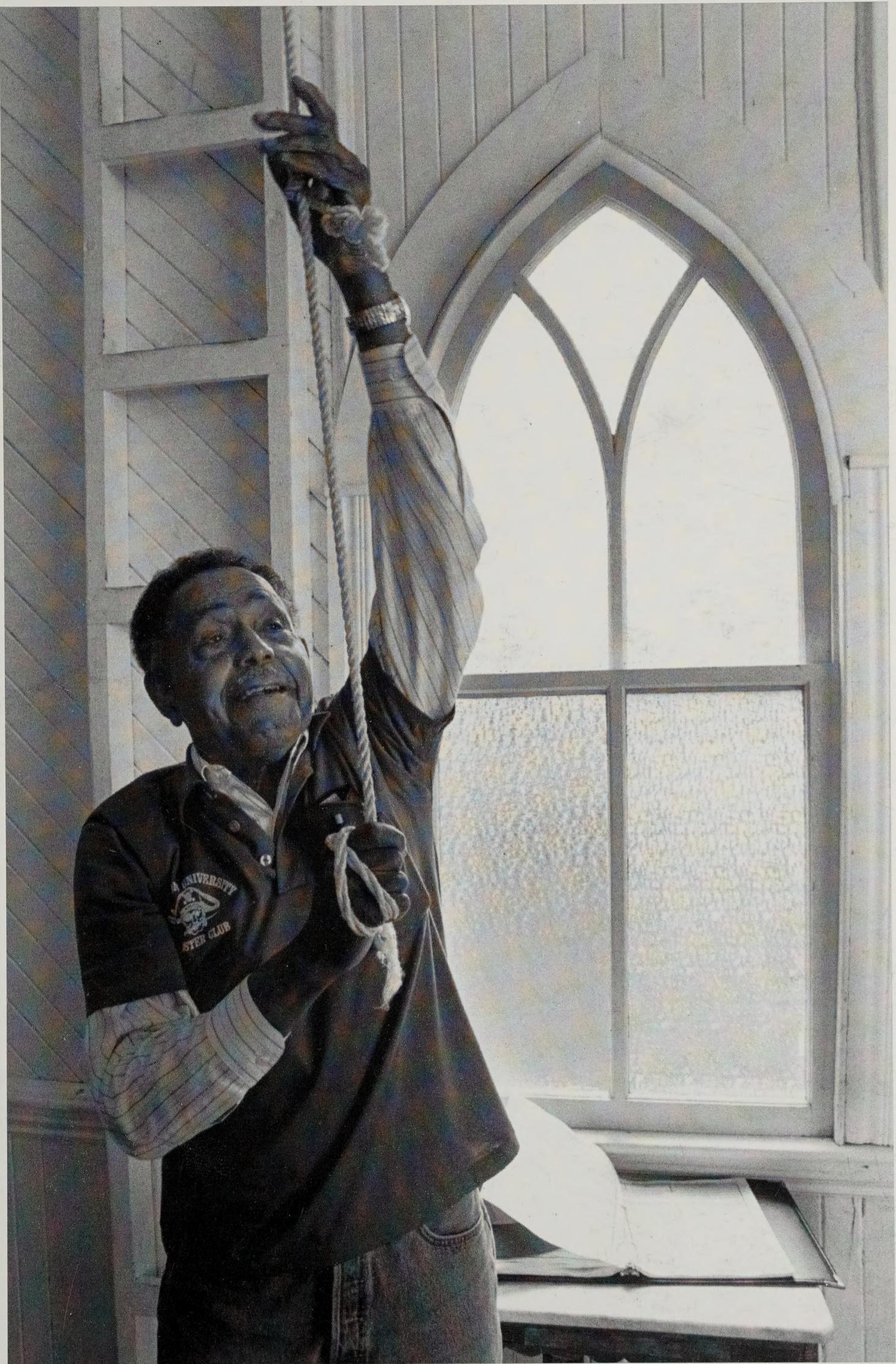


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North Carolina Folklore Journal

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North Carolina Folklore Journal

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Contents

Editor's Foreword 1

Essays

Family Legends and Lullabies: My Gift to John Foster West
Daun Daemon 3

Folklore of a Mountain Childhood (reprint from *NCFJ* 16.3)
John Foster West 8

Portsmouth Homecoming

Jan Eason 13

Tall Tales from Cheapside: Falstaff's Lying Legacy in
American Southern Literature

Greg Kelley 25

"Water Ways" in North Carolina: Representing Maritime
Communities at the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Betty J. Belanus 39

Review Essays

The Essential Earl Scruggs CD

Matt Meacham 51

*Listening for a Life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth
through Her Songs and Stories*

Joyce Joines Newman 59

String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont

Amy Davis 65

Contributors 69

2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival Programs
“Water Ways”: Mid-Atlantic Maritime Communities
Haiti: Freedom and Creativity from the Mountains to the Sea
Nuestra Musica: Music in Latino Culture



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Editor's Foreword

In the summer of 2004, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival continued its practice of assembling craftspeople, singers, dancers, storytellers, and many others from an array of different and distinct cultures. Visitors to the Mall in Washington, D.C., last year witnessed, among many things, the slow transformation of a lifeless block of tupelo gum into a decoy so artfully crafted that it floated like a duck, and looked like it was going to lift off at any moment. Some visitors tried on paper-mâché headdresses and moved to Vodou rhythms pounded out on homemade drums, while others savored the musical traditions of Afro-Cuban *santería*, Texas-Mexican *conjunto*, Dominican *meringue*, and learned new dances in the Salón de Baile. The interactions that occurred between Festival visitors and participants from mid-Atlantic coastal communities, the Caribbean, and Latin America were lively signs of the Festival's success. But the interactions that occurred among the participants themselves were, at times, surprising and spontaneous. Folksinger and story-teller Connie Mason recalls the following incident:

All of the musicians got to play at the hotel where Festival participants and presenters were staying. On my evening, I played "Casa de Jaiba" ["Crab House"], a song I wrote with Barbara Garrity-Blake about a crab picker in North Carolina who was missing her family back in Mexico. With all the "Nuestra Musica" performers present, I was either very brave or very foolish to offer a song that has some Spanish lyrics in it. But I felt I would never have a better test group, so I sang it.

When I finished, the applause was rewarding. But the best thing happened after I sat down. One of the Latino gentlemen came to me and said, "My wife asked me to say she loved your song. She could not come herself because she is crying. It has moved her greatly."

So, I gave him my CD, which has the song. He offered to pay for it, but I told him it was my gift to her. That night I called Barbara, my co-author, and gave her the good news!

The wonder of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival is the way in which it demonstrates—often interactively—the value of exposing our citizens to the richness of our multi-cultural world. However, the great gift of the Festival is that in bringing together such diversity it also highlights

the powerful message that the roots of our humanity draw nourishment not from our differences, but in the common experiences that bind us all. For more on the activities of Tar Heel citizens at the national Festival, see Betty J. Belanus' "Water Ways" in *North Carolina: Representing Maritime Communities at the 2004 Smithsonian Festival*" (39-49).

With this issue, the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* takes a glance backward and a significant step forward. Daun Daemon's fond recollection of the life and work of "Uncle John" Foster West is an attempt to preserve and pass on a bit of family tradition—the lullaby—that has already been widely consigned to the folklore scrapbook. As a tribute to West, we have reprinted an essay on children's lore that he wrote thirty-five years ago, for another time and an earlier audience. Jan Eason's photo essay on the 2004 Portsmouth Homecoming documents an effort to recapture the qualities of a past time, but does so with help from a technology that could scarcely have been imagined in 1968 when West declared that the "instant entertainment" offered by radio and television was obviating the need for "ancient traditional ways of passing the time" (12). By supplementing Jan's essay with a multi-media version available on the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*'s website, we increased fivefold the number of photos we could ordinarily have offered, and we have included an audio component as well. While it is with regret that we witness family folklore increasingly being supplanted by such technical wonders as PC's, video games, MP-3's, and portable DVD players, we also welcome the new possibilities for preservation and for transmission of folkways that computer technology has made available to us. As you read Jan's essay, please go to our website (<http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/NCFJ>) where you will see more of his evocative photographs. You will hear his voice and others' voices, including Jessie Lee Dominique's. She was the last child born on Portsmouth. You will also hear Connie Mason leading the 2004 Portsmouth Homecoming assembly in "Amazing Grace" while, in the background, Rudy Carter tolls the church bell, recalling for us the exact sound that Portsmouth islanders themselves heard more than ninety years ago.

Carmine Prioli

Family Legend and Lullaby Lore

My Gift to John Foster West

~ by Daun Daemon

Time was, mountain folk scratched a living from the land and spun stories from the air. They coaxed remedies from plants that most people today tread upon without a glance downward. They summoned entertainments from their hard work and sent their babies to sweet sleep with family lullabies seemingly without origin.

One of the most ardent chroniclers of such mountain folkways—through his fiction, poetry, and essays—is John Foster West, professor emeritus of English at Appalachian State University. In particular, his novel *Time Was* (1965), its sequel, *Appalachian Dawn* (1973), and the extended prose poem *This Proud Land* (1974) offer a compelling look at the life and lore of late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century North Carolina mountain people.

You could say that John Foster West poured his own life into those books and that he did so because those two things, his books and his roots, are the great passionate loves of his life. You might wonder what makes me think I can make that statement with such assurance. I should tell you that John Foster West is my kin, my beloved “Uncle John.”

When I listen to him tell the vibrant stories of his life and talk with animation about his work, I am fascinated. He remembers details and events from eight decades ago with such vividness that I can see, for example, my great-grandfather’s home place, even though I couldn’t possibly have ever gone there. I am rapt and he is enrapturing.

A while back, I sat down with him to ask about his past work with the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* and the North Carolina Folklore Society. He was vice president and president in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Our talk quickly turned to Uncle John’s writing and then his childhood. Folkways, storytelling, and his Appalachian upbringing are inextricable in his mind. He cannot speak about one topic without gleefully weaving in the others.

This pattern started early for Uncle John, who recalls taking a folklore course from the legendary Arthur Palmer Hudson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the 1940s: “When [Professor Hudson] found out where I was from, he pumped me for stories. He had me entertaining the class most of the damned time. I worked my way through that course telling about how we lived. I’m sure I made a

good grade because I was the only one who knew anything about folklore because I lived it!"¹

Eventually, he wrote it.

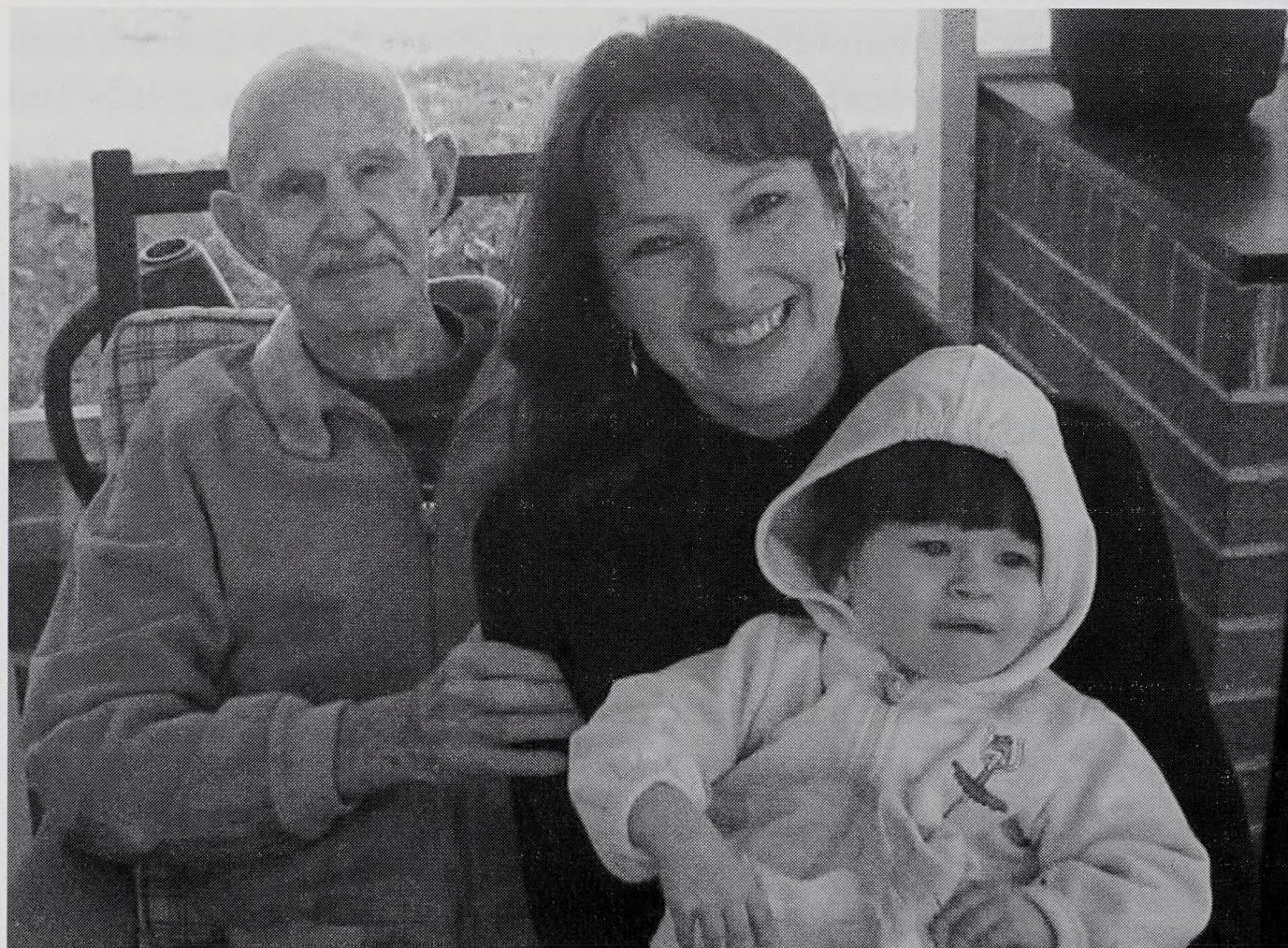
First, though, he penned stories for the pulps in the 1940s and 1950s, a way for an energetic young writer to make much-needed money. His science fiction appeared in publications like *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Fantastic Universe*. Nothing could be farther from the Blue Ridge than the places those stories took readers, but Uncle John's heart was always in the hills and hollers of home.

The person who encouraged him to stay there in his writing was another North Carolina legend, Guy Owen.²

Uncle John remembers his good friend well: "We were classmates at Carolina. He was the one who got me started writing about folklore. He encouraged me because of my background.

"We took creative writing together under Philips Russell. We'd go down to this restaurant in Chapel Hill and drink a kind of coffee we liked and talk about the class we'd just had. We'd talk for hours. We talked about becoming great writers."

Uncle John took Owen's advice to heart. He understood that he couldn't create characters or poetry about the hill people—his people—without immersing the reader in folkways.



John Foster West, Daun Daemon, and Liliana ("Lili") Faith DeHaan. Photo courtesy of Daun Daemon, 2004.

He told me, "If you don't use folklore, you don't understand what was important to the people. It clarifies what life was all about."

For Uncle John, life was about the mundane: the way people fixed their food, how they cured their ailments, how they comforted their fussy babies.

His fiery-haired sister, Verlee, could make a party out of the meanest work: "She would organize a molasses boiling where the people made molasses from sugar cane. Neighbor children would come to learn. Older people would come to socialize and sing mountain songs."

The young'uns would make games of their chores to ward off monotony and render the work less grueling. Some of it, Uncle John admits, was pure nonsense, like the game he and his siblings would play when shucking corn: "We'd holler 'Hull, gull, handful! How many?' Somebody would have to guess how many grains of corn you had in your hand. If they didn't get it right, they lost."

Uncle John didn't say what losing meant, exactly, but winning often was another story. The rewards weren't the cheap plastic prizes or bags of sugary treats today's children might expect, but something more symbolic and even fraught with future possibilities: "We would have corn shuckers, when people got together to shuck the corn. If you found a red ear of corn, you'd get a prize like getting to kiss a girl."

Doings like these inevitably infused Uncle John's novels and poems with the mountain spirit of ingenuity and survival. He particularly likes to tell the story of his birth in 1918, which he used to dramatic effect as the opening act of *Appalachian Dawn*:

My mother had the flu and a fever of 105 degrees. She couldn't nurse me because her milk dried up. The doctor walked around the house and barn and found an old liquor bottle and sterilized it and [got] an old reed from a fishing pole and sterilized it to use as a nipple. He found several layers of cloth and sterilized that and made a baby bottle and fed me fresh cow's milk. That's how he kept me alive.

Whenever he retells this story at family reunions or during one of my visits, my blood chills. If not for a country doctor possessed of an inventor's mind, I would have no cause to be writing this article.

This doctor really wasn't exceptional. People like him were the rule in Uncle John's young life, his father among them: "My daddy would quote rhymes to entertain the babies. Some of these rhymes were just made up, and some of the lullabies and rhymes came from slave rhymes. My daddy would get some of them from people sitting around camp-

fires when he traveled.” His father was a singing teacher, who traveled the mountain countryside giving lessons and singing at churches.

Among the songs families favored and passed on to their children were lullabies—useful, sometimes mournful or dark tunes that linger in the cradle of our memories. Uncle John’s most remembered lullaby is this:

Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Wrop it up in the tablecloth
And throw it up in the stable loft.
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?

Baby laugh and baby cry
Stuck my finger in the baby’s eye,
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?

It doesn’t make much sense, seems rather cruel for our age in which even patting a child’s head can raise suspicions of abuse, and is sung to a rather bland tune. But it is original, it has history, and it was without doubt all that the mother had in her to sing in a desperate moment. “It was a West family ditty The older children sang it to the younger babies. That’s how it got passed on,” Uncle John says. He also believes that somewhere, someone perched on a branch of our family tree still warbles that lullaby.

I’m not so sure. Sadly, I’ve never heard an aunt or cousin, a sister, or my mother sing it. If not for the fact that Uncle John wrote it down, the lullaby might be lost. He made the effort in his books to ensure that such family lore would not die with the generations.

“When I wrote *Time Was*, I wanted to teach people what life in the North Carolina hills was like back in the early 1900s,” he told me. “*Appalachian Dawn* picked up where *Time Was* left off. It was about my early life and how I learned folklore. I wanted to teach my children how I learned what I knew and what was important in a mountain upbringing and what was important in our family.”

After I left Uncle John’s chalet just off the Blue Ridge Parkway the day I spoke with him about these things, I felt a sobering sadness that the rituals, games, and lullabies of his younger years most likely will not be passed on within my family. Like most tots today, our small children sing along with a purple dinosaur named “Barney” and learn who-knows-what from those colorfully attired British babies sporting antennae, the “Teletubbies.” Store-bought contraptions that turn and play music nudge the infants into their naps.

Some young mothers today sing lullabies, perhaps, but not the kind composed on the spot, created for the moment from whatever words and ideas came from the frantic mother's head. Most are rote tunes we've all heard or popular songs picked up from the radio. A "wropped" baby tossed into a stable loft doesn't figure in.

In my family, at least, it should. That lullaby is more than a nonsense song—it is a voice that sings through time past and says, "we made it."

I need to clarify something.

John Foster West is my *great*-uncle. He is the brother of my grandmother, Vernice Armes West, who was the mother of my mother, Mickey Armes Craig. I am the sister of Debra Craig Holsclaw, who is the mother of Elizabeth Holsclaw DeHaan, who, in turn, is the mother of my own great-niece, Liliana Faith DeHaan. "Lili," as we call her, is the great-great-great niece of John Foster West. Uncle John is eighty-six; Lili is one.

Eighty-five years, five generations, and several cultural revolutions separate them, but I felt that they should have a bond that transcends time. So I asked my niece, Elizabeth, to learn Uncle John's favorite lullaby, to sing it in her own way to Lili. This premeditated, self-conscious effort may not be consistent with the traditional means for transmitting family lore. But it may be the only way to ensure and safeguard its voyage into this century and, perhaps through Lili's descendants, into the century beyond.

Whatcha gonna do with the baby?

Endnotes

¹ This quotation and subsequent quotations are from an interview by the author with John Foster West, March 12, 2004, Boone, NC.

² Author of *The Ballad of the Film-flam Man* (1967) and many other books and articles about North Carolina folklore, Guy Owen (1925-1981) co-edited the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* with Richard Walser (1908-1988), also a legendary North Carolina writer, from 1966 until 1973. It was Owen and Walser who convinced John Foster West to become president of the North Carolina Folklore Society.

Folklore of a Mountain Childhood*

~*by John Foster West*

*I*n the Appalachians of North Carolina, where I was born and lived my early years, a child was trained, sustained, and entertained through the folklore of childhood. In the cradle he was comforted by regional lullabies, and on the parents' knees, by rhythmical verse (called rhymes) vocally composed for infants. Later on, communal participation involved the young child in folk games, dances, riddle solving, ballad singing, superstitions, and cures for childhood afflictions.

The lullaby I recall best went something like this:

Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Wrop it up in the tablecloth
And throw it up in the stable loft.
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?

Baby laugh and baby cry,
Stuck my finger in the baby's eye,
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?
Whatcha gonna do with the baby?

I remember vividly my father bouncing me on his knee and chanting:

Ole Granny Rattletrap
Settin' on a log,
Finger on the trigger
And eye on a hawg.

Or

Geese in the millpond
Pickin' out moss;
Devil on the hillside
Runnin' like a hoss.

There were several games the older members of the family could play with the infant's toes or hands. My father's favorite was to twist the toes, one by one, beginning with the big toe, and uttering the following:

Big toe: "This old sow say, 'Let's go steal wheat.'"

Second toe: "This little pig say, 'Where we get hit at?'"

*This article originally appeared in the North Carolina Folklore Journal 16.3 (November 1968), 166-169.

Third toe: "This little pig say, 'Massa's barn.'"

Fourth toe: "This little pig say, 'I tell Massa.'"

Little toe (which would be twisted from side to side at this point): "This little pig say, 'Wee! wee! wee! I can't get over the doorsill.'"

There was a little game played with the hands, too. An older member of the family would clasp his hands together, thumbs pointing upward above his double fist and would say,

Here's the church and here's the steeple:

Open the door, and where's the people?

At the same time he would open his hands at the wrists and let the child see inside, where it was indeed empty. Then he would clasp his hands together, fingers on the inside, thumbs again upward, and would say,

Here's the church and here's the steeple:

Open the door and LOOK AT THE PEOPLE!

At that point the entertainer would open his hands, revealing eight wriggling people dangling from the ceiling of the little church.

When I was no more than three, my father taught me these senseless chants:

Nottle, nottle, forty fingers, hoot!

Start a-power, kizzley coot, coot a-kasy—

Francis Schizzledick—mobbledick—pibbledick—null.

And

Seen anything of a high, tall, rawboned boy
about the size of a man?

Run away from Bussley Bungs day after tomorr.

Rid a steer heifer with a straw bridle and a hay saddle.

See anything of this man,

I'll give'ye three pints of pigeon milk
churned by the scratch of a duck.

My sisters would often sing me waking-up songs, such as

Wake up, old man,

You slept too late.

The crawfish is done

And passed your gate.

The older children of the Appalachians had to arrange their own entertainment during those brief intervals when they were not busy in the rockey fields or with chores. Usually it was some game handed down from grandparents and parents. Some of the games were universal, such as hide-and-go-seek, dropping the handkerchief, or blind-man's bluff, which we called "blindfold." Others were peculiar to our region and are very likely still played in more remote areas.

The most interesting aspect of the games to the folklorist, however, was the manner in which the initial IT was selected. The IT was the first person to be blindfolded or the one who had to hide his eyes first in hide-and-go-seek while the others concealed themselves. You did not volunteer. You did not flip a coin. You lined up, and the natural leader of the group uttered a pointing-out rhyme, while pointing to a different individual with each word spoken. The one pointed to, when the last word was uttered, was IT, and no arguments. The pointing-out rhyme I remember best was

William a Trimmietoe,
He is a good fisherman.
He catches fishes, puts them in dishes.
He catches hens, puts them in pens.
Wire, brier, limberlock,
Ten geese in a flock,
Some flew east, some flew west,
Some flew over a cuckoo nest.
O-U-T! out goes HE—
You—old—dirty—dishrag—YOU!

Another way children entertained themselves was by solving riddles. Sometimes they were impossible to answer, and sometimes they would contain sufficient clues so that a bright mind could frequently come up with the answer. One impossible riddle went like this:

On Love I sit, on Love I stand,
Love I hold in my right hand.
Love I see in yander far tree;
If you'll unriddle this, you may hang me.

A man had been condemned to hang. His only chance for escape depended on whether or not he could ask his jailer a riddle he could not answer. His sweetheart had killed his little dog, named Love, and had cut him up into pieces. The prisoner sat on a piece of Love, placed a piece

in his shoe, a piece in his right hand, and had the rest hung in a tree he could see from his cell window.

The following riddle is fairly simple and easy to answer by one who is alert:

As I was going to Saint Ives,
I met a man with seven wives,
And seven wives had seven sacks,
And seven sacks had seven cats,
And seven cats had seven kits:
How many were going to Saint Ives?

The answer, of course, is *one*. The man *met* all the others.

My father's favorite riddle was more difficult to answer but still contained the clues to its solution. "A man comes to a foot log across a river. He is carrying a fox, a goose, and a bag of corn, and can carry only one across the foot log at a time. If he carries the fox across first, the goose will eat the corn while he is gone. If he carries the corn across first, the fox will eat the goose. How does he get across the foot log with all three of his possessions?"

The answer is that he carries the goose across first, leaving the fox with the corn. Then he goes back and gets the fox. After he gets across with the fox, he carries the goose back across, leaving it and taking the corn across. He leaves the corn with the fox and goes back and gets the goose.

There were many superstitions accepted as gospel by the mountain child. When you heard the first whippoorwill in the spring, you rolled over three times, and made three wishes, all of which would come true. After a thunderstorm, you could thrust a nail into the ground, place your ear close to the head, and hear the devil cursing his wife. When a girl spent the night for the first time in a bed, she would name each of the bedposts one of the boys she liked best. The next morning, the post she looked at first would indicate the boy she would marry.

With the right incantation, you could make a doodlebug come out of his hole. The doodlebug is the regional name for the ant lion, an ugly ash-colored bug which creates a funnel-shaped hole in the ground into which stray ants tumble. The doodlebug would conceal himself below the sand at the bottom of the hole. We would lean over the doodlebug hole and chant:

Doodlebug, doodlebug, get a cup of coffee.
Doodlebug, doodlebug, get a cup of coffee.

But the doodlebug would not come out. Then we would chant:

Doodlebug, doodlebug, come to supper.
Doodlebug, doodlebug, come to supper.

Still the creature would not come out. Finally, we would chant:

Doodlebug, doodlebug, your house is on fire!
Doodlebug, doodlebug, your house is on fire!

At this warning, the doodlebug would work himself out from beneath the sand at the bottom of his hole and into view. It always worked.

In the mountains the inch-worm, which came in several colors, was called the measuring worm. When you discovered a measuring worm on you inching along, he was measuring you for a new suit, which you would get soon. If you placed the worm on yourself, the spell did not work.

Warts and freckles were common unwanted blemishes most mountain children tried to rid themselves of. The best way to "get shet of a wart" was to rub it with two or three pennies, tie them in a handkerchief, and drop it beside a road. Whoever found the pennies and took them would catch the wart, which would leave the one afflicted. The way to rid yourself of freckles was to wash your face with old stump water, preferably taken from an oak stump. And every mountain boy knew that juice from a grapevine would make pubic hair appear early.

This is only a limited survey of childhood folklore as it existed in the Appalachians three decades ago. Undoubtedly, radio and television have brought instant entertainment to many areas of the mountains, obviating the need for ancient traditional ways of passing the time. But one likes to think that somewhere in lonely coves and hidden valleys he can still discover children asking old riddles, chanting pointing-out rhymes before a fast game of blindfold, or crouched over a doodlebug hole telling him his house is on fire. Such folkways are too precious to be supplanted entirely by Mighty Mouse or the Lone Ranger.



Portsmouth Homecoming*

~ by Jan Eason

*L*ast year, on the first Saturday after Easter, about 400 people gathered in Portsmouth village, an island ghost town on the northernmost reach of Cape Lookout National Seashore. It was a warm, sunny, early spring day. All those visitors gave Portsmouth the appearance of a thriving community, with a scattering of houses, a post office, a one-room school and, near the center of the village, a freshly maintained clapboard church. Sacred music drifted through the open church doors, sung by a congregation that was mostly white. But the assembly of churchgoers also included a few African Americans. At 11:00 A.M., one of the men hauled the bell rope, summoning everyone to worship. On shore, the event was billed as a "Portsmouth Homecoming." But it was more like a pilgrimage. Some people traveled hundreds of miles to attend. In part, what made this gathering remarkable is Portsmouth's remote location. To get there, most travelers voyage first to Ocracoke. That trip alone is a two-hour ferryboat ride from Cedar Island, the last of a string of coastal communities in the Down East region of Carteret County. At Ocracoke, for a small fee, Captain Rudy Austin (see photo, p. 20) will ferry landsmen across Ocracoke Inlet to Portsmouth. There is no "public" transportation. On Portsmouth Island, there are no hard surface roads. No electricity. No potable water. At times, however, there are swarms of insects. So, what is the allure of this place? Why is it so important to hundreds of people?

* * *

By American standards, the village has a long history dating back to 1753, when the town of Portsmouth was authorized by the North Carolina Colonial Assembly for the purposes of facilitating the shipping and storage of cargo, and of erecting a fort to protect the hundreds of American vessels that annually sailed through Ocracoke Inlet. For many years, it was the state's largest and busiest port.¹

**A multi-media version of this essay was presented December 8, 2004, as the final project for the Certificate in Documentary Studies awarded by the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. This version may be seen and heard on the website of the North Carolina Folklore Journal, <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/NCFJ>. Work on the Portsmouth Homecoming project is continuing with a generous grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council.*

Because North Carolina's inland waterways are shallow, heavily laden ships had to transfer their cargo to lighter, shallow draft boats. This process was called "lightering," and it was a thriving business for Portsmouth. Much has been written about this history of Portsmouth in local magazines and small publications for tourist consumption, but these almost never mention that this business depended upon slave labor.² Soon after the Civil War began, Union forces occupied Portsmouth, and many of the residents left for the mainland. Some historians believe that many of those who stayed behind were either loyal to the Union or indifferent to the Confederacy.³

Storms, shifting sand, and a changing economy were responsible for the decline of Portsmouth after the Civil War. In 1860, before the war, over 500 people lived at Portsmouth, including over 100 slaves. There were more than 100 houses. In 1870, 341 individuals lived there and the number of houses declined to sixty. The decrease in population is attributed largely to the loss of the slave population. Only one former slave family—Rose Ireland and her children—remained when the war ended. One of Rose's grandsons was Henry Pigott, who spent most of his life at Portsmouth and was one of the last residents to leave the island. In 1970, due to serious illness, he moved to Ocracoke and lived with his friend, Junius Austin, who cared for Henry until his death in January 1971. Junius saw to it that Henry was buried at Portsmouth. After Henry's death, the last two residents, Elma Dixon and Marion Babb, also left the island, and with their departure Portsmouth saw the last of its permanent human residents.

In the 1970's, the state of North Carolina acquired all of Core Banks and Shackleford Banks, including Portsmouth, and donated it to the National Park Service to create the Cape Lookout National Seashore. Today there are only about twenty structures standing at Portsmouth, and because of its historical status, the village is maintained by the National Park Service. These remaining buildings give Portsmouth the physical appearance of a living community, but it is the Methodist church that invests the village with a profound sense of place. Without the church, the Homecoming would not be the same, and very few people would visit the site.

Although no one lives permanently at Portsmouth and it is not a popular tourist attraction, several groups of people still work to ensure that the Portsmouth Homecoming takes place. One group—the Friends of Portsmouth Island—consists of former residents, descendants of former residents, and people who have no connection with the village other than a love for the place. Currently, the Friends of Portsmouth

Island numbers more than 300 members. Another entity, The National Park Service, also has a volunteer program. Consisting mainly of retirees, the volunteers live and work at Portsmouth for several weeks each year. They are like ambassadors, tour guides, and maintenance people all rolled into one.

The Park Service also administers the Historic Leasing Program in which historic structures in National Parks are leased to private individuals for a limited period of time to help cover the cost of maintenance. At Portsmouth, seven of its old houses are part of this program. The lessees have agreed to restore and maintain the dwellings in exchange for the privilege of using them for a limited period of time, usually fifteen years. Labor and materials for restoration and repairs can be used to offset rent payments.

* * *

My involvement with Portsmouth started in the summer of 2001 while I was vacationing on Ocracoke with my future wife, Martha Walton. From South Point, we could look across Ocracoke Inlet and see Portsmouth Island. With binoculars, I could see a steeple rising above the trees. We knew that Portsmouth was an abandoned village, and as photographers, we couldn't wait to land there and take pictures of the weathered buildings.

Next morning, we met Rudy Austin at his dock. Rudy was born on Ocracoke and put in thirty years service as a captain with the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Ferry Division. He had ancestors who lived at Portsmouth. His great-grandmother and his grandfather were both born on Portsmouth. His father, Junius Austin, lived at Ocracoke and for years served as caretaker of a hunting and fishing club that occupied the Portsmouth Life Saving Station after it was decommissioned. On the way over, Rudy told us stories about his family and the village. Hearing about Portsmouth, however, did not prepare me for the experience of seeing it for the first time. It appeared to be a *living* community. Most of the buildings were in good condition, and I noticed several cemeteries that were also being cared for. But what made the experience eerie was the fact that there were no living people to be seen anywhere. If Portsmouth was a ghost town, it was a particularly well-maintained one.

I wanted somehow to capture in photographs the quality of my first experience on Portsmouth. That is, the unnerving sense of being in a living human community where human beings were substantially absent. Martha and I made several additional trips to Portsmouth that summer.

We carried with us a view camera and the last batch of 4" x 5" infrared film that Kodak produced.⁴ The film renders clear skies as black and vegetation as white. The resulting contrasts conveyed the eerie feeling I experienced when first seeing Portsmouth. (See back cover photos.)

While photographing the village, we met Ed and Renee Burgess, two National Park Service volunteers who live at Portsmouth for six weeks each summer. (See photo, inside back cover.) Their year-round home is in Burlington, North Carolina, and both are former educators. They always wanted to be lighthouse keepers when they retired, but those positions were filled so they took the positions at Portsmouth. Later, when there were openings for lighthouse keepers, they declined and decided to stay at Portsmouth because of their attachment to the place. Ed said, "Being volunteers at Portsmouth has opened up a completely new direction in our lives We have made many wonderful acquaintances and friendships and learned so much about the eastern part of the state which we didn't know, particularly about Portsmouth." Renee added, "I keep telling everyone that it's the Outer Banks the way it used to be. Everything else is commercial, overdeveloped, and then you have this wonderful old village that's preserved for us, for our children, and for our grandchildren. It's always going to be the same because there is a commitment there to keeping it as it was. It's very special."⁵

Ed and Renee told us about the Friends of Portsmouth Island. We joined the group, and at our first meeting I showed some of the pictures we took on Portsmouth. One of the members suggested that I contact Connie Mason, the historian/collections manager at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort. (See photo, p. 24.) In the 1980s, Connie was a National Park Service field worker who researched the history of Portsmouth and interviewed some of the village's last residents. After meeting with several other museum staff members, I was invited to present an exhibit of photographs. Subsequently, fifteen of the prints from Portsmouth were displayed at the Maritime Museum in the Fall of 2003.

One thing led to another. I continued to visit Portsmouth and met more people connected to the place. While traveling on the Cedar Island ferry to the 2004 Homecoming, I met and talked with Jessie Lee Dominique. (See photo, p. 24.) "Lee," as she is known, was the last baby born on Portsmouth. She told me all about growing up in the village, so I asked her what continues to make the place so important. "You know, it really is the last authentic village on the Outer Banks," she said. Then, she added: "Thank God for the Park Service, because if the National Park Service had not taken that island, it would now be the same as Ocracoke, or Hatteras, or Buxton, or Nags Head, or whatever. It's real-

ly the only place that's left and as far as I'm concerned, I really don't believe that there's another place on earth as peaceful as that village."⁶

* * *

We arrived at Ocracoke at about noon on Friday, the day before Homecoming. As before, Rudy Austin transported us across the inlet. On the island, we photographed the volunteers getting Portsmouth ready. For this Homecoming, a large tent was being erected for the worship service. At the 2002 Homecoming, they learned that the church could not accommodate all the people who were likely to arrive. The weather was perfect and the forecast for Saturday was for more of the same. Later, we returned to Ocracoke and checked into our motel. We ate dinner and turned in so that we could catch the first boat to Portsmouth early on Saturday.

Next morning, we met Rudy at his dock and departed at 7:30. We wanted to be early so that we could photograph all the events planned for the day. The Post Office and Visitors Center opened at 8:45 A.M. For this one day, the U.S. Postal Service set up a temporary office so that letters and post cards could be postmarked at Portsmouth.

One of the highlights of the day was the hymn singing in the church from 10:00 to 11:00 A.M. Since singing is one of her many talents, Connie Mason led the congregation. Of course, Lee Dominique was there, dressed for worship. She explained that her mother would never allow her to go into the church unless she wore her "Sunday" clothes. Afterwards, Lee said, "When we first started [singing], there were some people there. I kept hearing more voices and more voices, and at one point I turned around and looked and the place is just full . . . to overflowing for the hymn sing. And it was packed. It was just wonderful. I get goose bumps every time I talk about it."⁷

The eleven o'clock service was held under the tent in front of the church. Rodney Kemp, Lee Dominique, and Dot Salter Willis all spoke. Both Lee and Dot are former residents. Rudy Carter read scripture from Henry Pigott's Bible. The Bible is a link to Portsmouth's past. When Henry became terminally ill and went to live with Junius Austin at Ocracoke, he bequeathed the Bible to his friend, Junius. Rudy Austin, who is Junius' son, is now the caretaker of Henry's Bible.

The service ended at noon with the tolling of the church bell and with Connie Mason leading us in "Amazing Grace." For most people, it was probably the most moving part of the ceremony. Later, I asked Connie about that part of the service. She said the bell at Portsmouth is only tolled at Homecoming. Connie also noted that it was Henry Pigott's

job to ring the bell. It is the sound that connects us directly to the island's past. Everybody in the village heard that bell from the time the church was rebuilt in 1914 until the last permanent resident departed. Connie said that when Rudy tolled the bell at Homecoming, he made the church "a place for us to be at one with all those people who heard that bell through all the years. And then we sang 'Amazing Grace' to honor them and the house of worship there. It was so special to me. It just gave me chills."⁸

After the service, everyone lined up for the potluck dinner on the church grounds. It was comforting to have down home cooking in such an isolated place. All the favorite southern delights were available—fried chicken, potato salad, butter beans, and lots of desserts, including banana pudding.

Some of the houses were open during the day. This is a rare event, because most of the houses are leased to individuals under the Historic Leasing Program. None is leased by former residents or descendants of former residents. As I watched Rudy Carter and his family tour the Henry Pigott house, I couldn't help but wonder what Homecoming meant to them, descendants of slaves who at one time worked at Portsmouth. (See photo, p. 21.) After talking to Rudy and his family, I sensed that Homecoming for them was, at best, bittersweet. That which evokes romantic memories for some can be a reminder of loss for others.

* * *

My perception of Portsmouth has changed a lot over the last four years. When I first visited in 2001, I expected to find something like a ghost town. There was beauty in the starkness and serenity of the village. But I found much more. I keep returning to the island and every time I visit I discover something new, almost like Portsmouth has a kind of unique status in the world. Portsmouth reveals itself over time. It can't be rushed. I think my photos now show the complexity of Portsmouth as an ongoing, thriving "community," a site where the past, present, and future share common ground.

I have met many people at Portsmouth—Ed and Renee Burgess, Connie Mason, Lee Dominique, Dot Salter Willis, Ellen Cloud, Ann Ehringhaus, Dave Frum, Park Superintendent Bob Vogel, and Rudy Carter just to name a few. We all keep returning to Portsmouth to find something. What is the attraction? Is it the strong "sense of place" where lives were lived, and some were lost to the sea? Is it a longing for the taste of a more simple, independent lifestyle? Is it to confront the still unresolved social issues tied to the legacies of slavery and racism? I think the attraction is in confronting all of these questions, and many more.

Because Portsmouth village is part of Cape Lookout National Seashore, it is forever in the public trust. It will be preserved as long as there is a commitment to keep it that way, or until one of those so-called “monster” hurricanes sweeps it away. That uncertain future is part of the appeal, too. Seeing how fragile the place really is reminds us of the fragility and uncertainty of our own lives. On the island, we sense the struggle that people on Portsmouth had on a daily basis. Their concerns were survival and maintaining their ties to their village and to each other. Those concerns produced some pretty strong bonds among themselves and their descendants—both biological and spiritual—who return every two years to hear the Portsmouth church bell toll.

Endnotes

¹ Stick, pp. 40-43; 305-07. Stick notes that figures for 1836-37 showed that more than 1,400 vessels passed through Ocracoke Inlet in a twelve-month period. In 1846, the number of ill seamen who were in the area was so high that the U.S. government established a marine hospital in Portsmouth to care for them (306).

² For an account of slave labor in coastal North Carolina, see Cecelski, David S. *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

³ For an account of life on the Outer Banks during the Civil War, see Mallison, Fred M. *The Civil War on the Outer Banks: A History of the Late Rebellion Along the Coast of North Carolina from Carteret to Currituck*. North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, Inc. 1998, and Carbone, John S. *The Civil War in Coastal North Carolina*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 2001.

⁴ Kodak ended production of its 4" x 5" infrared film in 2000.

⁵ Interview by the author, Raleigh, NC, November 17, 2004.

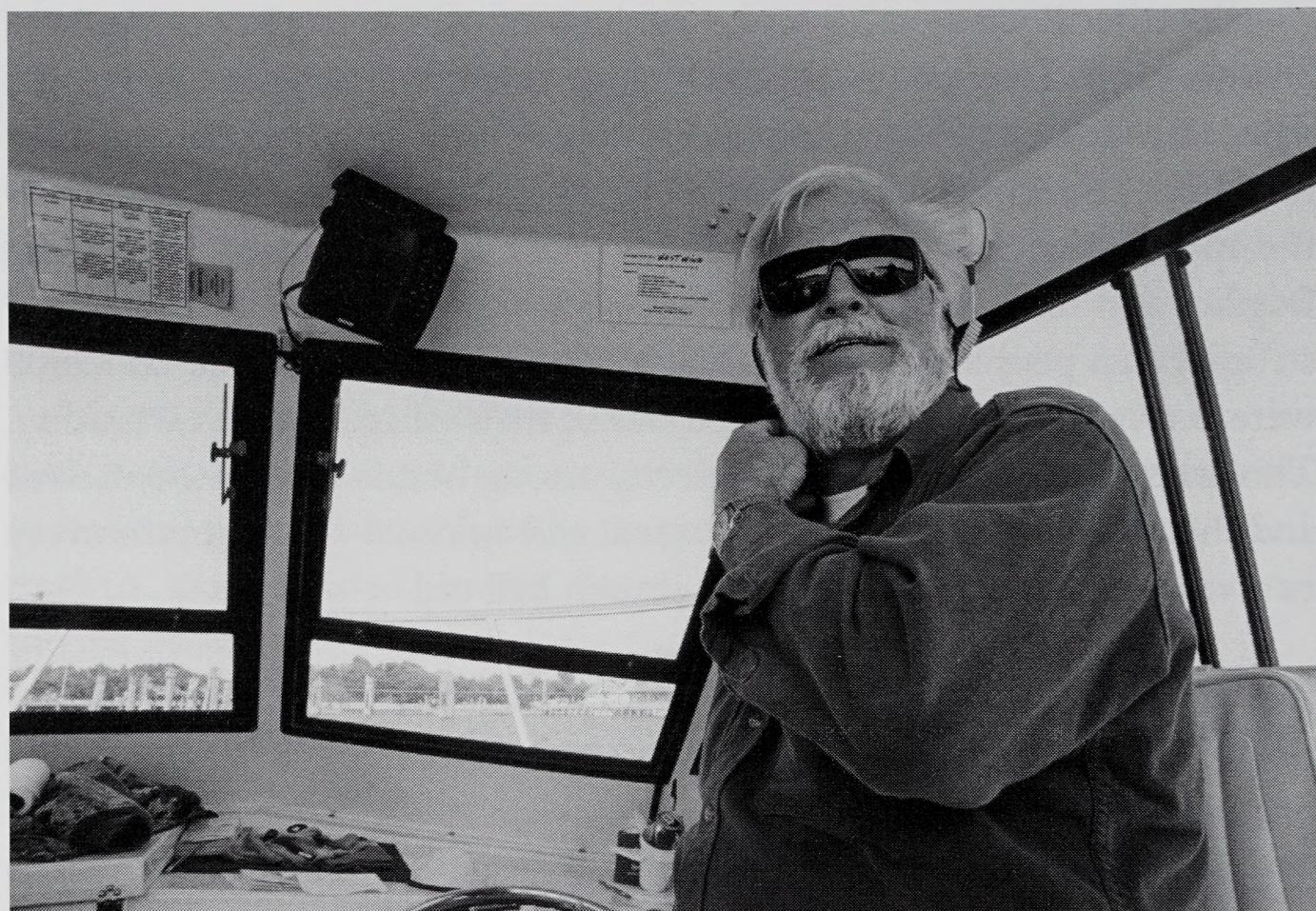
⁶ Interview by the author, Cedar Island/Ocracoke ferry, NC, April 16, 2004.

⁷ Interview by the author, Beaufort, NC, November 8, 2004.

⁸ Interview by the author, Beaufort, NC, November 8, 2004. Connie Mason was a recipient of the North Carolina Folklore Society's Brown-Hudson Award in 2004. For the award citation, see *NCFJ* 51.2 (Fall-Winter 2004), pp. 58-61.

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Captain Rudy Austin, Ocracoke, NC. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Assembly for outdoor church service, Portsmouth Homecoming. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*





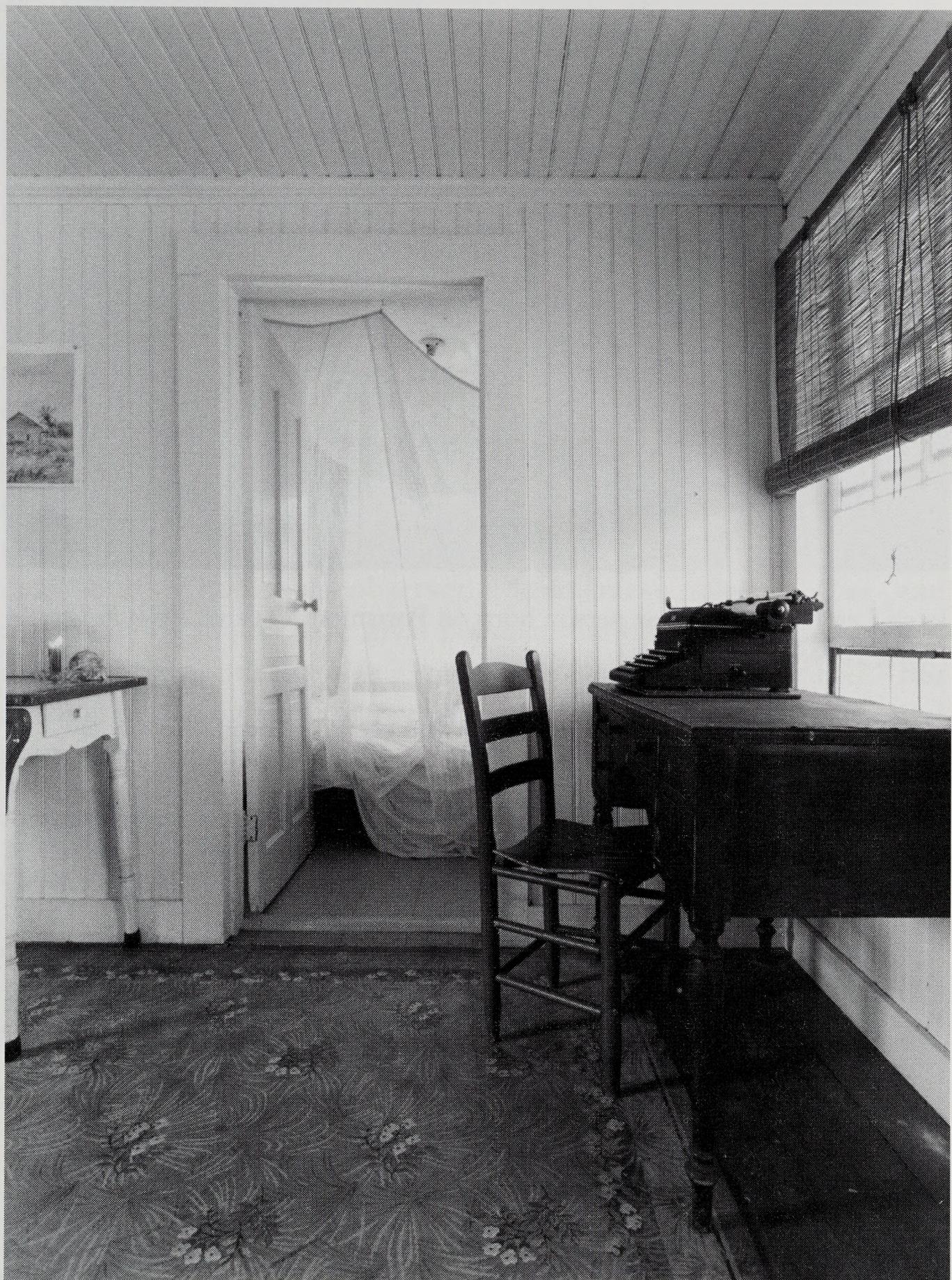
Lining up for dinner on the grounds, Portsmouth Homecoming. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Relatives of Henry Pigott assemble in front of Henry's cottage, Portsmouth Homecoming. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*





Interior of the Roy Robinson house, Portsmouth Island. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*



Interior of the Roy Robinson house, Portsmouth Island. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*



Jessie Lee Dominique, last person born on Portsmouth Island. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Connie Mason leading the assembly in a Homecoming hymn. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*



Tall Tales from Cheapside:

Falstaff's Lying Legacy in American Southern Literature

~ by Greg Kelley

Davy Crockett once commented of the Kentucky frontiersman: “If he can’t hunt, perhaps he can fight; if he can’t fight, perhaps he can scream; and if he can’t scream, perhaps he can grin pretty severe; and if he can’t do that, perhaps he can tell a story.”¹ Indeed, the flamboyant, swaggering frontier tall tale tellers and local colorists of American literature were invariably skilled narrators. The comic adventure tales and exaggerated lies chronicling outlandish deeds of fishing, hunting, and fighting flourished in the new country. These stories, labeled alternately as windies, longbows² and whoppers, captured something of the exuberant national character and gave verbal expression to the wild individuality of the American frontier. It is “no cause for wonder,” Stith Thompson observed, “that these tales of lies and exaggerations should have great popularity in the rapid opening up of the American continent, with its incredible events of everyday life.”³ But a common assumption concerning the geographical and historical provenance of the tall tale—that it was only a nineteenth-century American phenomenon—is erroneous, for the genre has plenty of European counterparts and precursors. Though appropriately suited to the social climate of expanding America, the tall tale fit into a much older European narrative tradition.⁴ It is my proposition that Shakespeare placed himself squarely in that tradition with *1 Henry IV*. The storytelling talents of Falstaff evoke already-established literary lying conventions in Europe and anticipate some American applications. Among those, we can note specific influences on Joseph G. Baldwin (1815-1864) and the classic American frontier liar Davy Crockett (1786-1836) himself.

An attorney on the raucous Mississippi and Alabama frontiers in the 1830s and 40s, Joseph G. Baldwin drew upon his experiences to create *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1835), a series of vignettes and satires depicting the local flavor during that turbulent time. Affiliating himself with other important southwest humorists like Augustus Baldwin Longstreet and Johnson Jones Hooper, Baldwin sketched a range of colorful characters—fraudulent lawyers, illiterate judges, bungling prosecutors. *Flush Times* includes the portrayal of a garrulous

Kentucky lawyer named Cave Burton, known for his extravagant rhetorical prowess and insatiable appetite. Baldwin describes Burton, sometimes called “The Blowing Cave” by fellow lawyers at the bar, as a “large, red-faced, burly fellow, good-natured and unscrupulous, with a good run of anecdote and natural humor, and some power of narrative [He never] rose from the table satisfied, though he often rose surfeited. . . . He was as good in liquids as in solids. He never refused a drink.” And Burton himself judged the greatness of a man “not by what he could do, but by what he could hold; not by what he left, but by what he consumed.”⁵ One would be hard pressed to imagine a literary character whose physical characteristics and temperament are more closely modeled on Falstaff as a prototype, described by Prince Hal on one occasion as “fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon” (I.2.2-4). The lumbering knight, like Burton, is the embodiment of overindulgence. The decadent milieu of gorging and guzzling for these characters naturally accommodates a range of bawdy repartee, verbal excesses, and license of wit—expressed in exchanges of colorful invectives, pranks, and tales of exaggeration. On that account, it should not surprise us that both Falstaff and Burton are master narrators.

Moreover, their particular social environs play an operative role in their production of exaggerated tales. As Carolyn S. Brown notes in *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature* (1987), the lies of American literature emanated from specialized settings such as stagecoaches, steamboats, Southern verandas, and perhaps most frequently from taverns and saloons. These “leisure environments” engendered all sorts of verbal folklore and practically bred a new class of raconteurs who comprised “a subculture on the geographical or social fringes of the larger culture” (32). Falstaff and his ragtag companions occupy a similar marginalized niche within the larger social context of *1 Henry IV*. They gather frequently at the Boar’s Head tavern in Eastcheap, the familiar place whose atmosphere of drinking and joking affords their raucous behavior its freest expression. Shakespeare may have modeled the Boar’s Head on his own experience as one of an assembly of Elizabethan writers who met at the Mermaid Tavern in London’s Cheapside district. He may also have been drawing upon literary precedents such as Poggio’s fifteenth-century *Facetiae*, which describes a secluded location known as the *Bugiale*, a “sort of laboratory for fibs.” Like Poggio’s *Bugiale*, the Boar’s Head functions as the designated leisure setting, the place of “merry confabulation”⁶ where news of the day is exchanged and where conversation and boisterous debate flow as freely as the drinks.

Burton and his compatriots assemble at a fellow lawyer's office after hours, and the setting is invitingly democratic: "Those were not the days of invitations: a lawyer's office, night or day, was as public a place as the court-house, and, among the members of the bar at that early period, there were no privileged seats at a frolic any more than in the pit of a theatre. All came who chose" (159). As it turns out, all those who choose to come to the law office and the Boar's Head are male; and thus the respective groups constitute small, though clearly not elite, men's clubs. It is fitting, therefore, that lying tales should unfold in those locations, for the social features of a male-dominated setting naturally produce hyperbolic narratives chronicling "manly" events.⁷

The comparison of the two settings is more than just a matter of dexterous interpretation, for Baldwin deliberately invokes the dramatized sociability of *1 Henry IV* as a literary archetype. Baldwin's speaker begins the internal frame tale this way: "There were about a dozen of us, as fun-loving 'youth,' as since the old frolics at Cheapside or the Boar's Head, ever met together . . ." (159). In these settings, Shakespeare and Baldwin each create central narrative set pieces for their storytellers, orchestrated by other characters as occasions of practical joking. Early in *1 Henry IV* we find Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill conspiring in a plot to rob a band of franklins on the road to Canterbury. There are multiple levels of play at work in the robbery, as Hal and Poins complicate the antics by disguising themselves and robbing the robbers. Their familiarity with Falstaff's talent for lying becomes the basis for their elaborate practical joke. "The virtue of this jest," Poins informs Hal, "will be the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper: how thirty, at least, he fought with; what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured: and in the reproof of this lives the jest" (I.2.186-90). The hoax sets the stage for a few memorable moments of physical comedy and provides a kernel event upon which Falstaff can later build an elaborately exaggerated story. Because we are privy to both the false robbery as it occurs and Falstaff's later narrative presentation of that event, we are able to witness, in this case, the mechanics of his lying.

Cave Burton is drawn to the festivities at the law offices by the promise of a feast of oysters and Irish whiskey. Present also is Old Judge Sawbridge, himself a gourmand, who proposes a trick at Burton's expense. Knowing well enough that "if there was one thing that Cave liked better than anything else, eating and drinking excepted, it was telling a story," the judge suggests to the fellows that they persuade Burton into one of his familiar "Kentucky yarns" (not a difficult task)

and “as he is in the agony of it, to withdraw, one by one, and eat up all the oysters” (160-161). Burton’s having to decide between the two of his favorite activities, the judge knows, would naturally place him in an existential dilemma—with comic results.

Ethnographic observations of real-life tall tale events provide us with insights into the performative elements at work in these two literary contexts. A poorly managed tale of exaggeration will not withstand the close scrutiny of a defiant audience, and listeners may assume a posture of skepticism and disdain, so it is incumbent upon the seasoned narrator to strike a balance between the incredible and the plausible. The tall tale is known by these opposing impulses, which paradoxically “cover yet reveal [the tale’s] true nature,” argues James E. Caron. Furthermore, the tall tale takes its energy from “the tension created by its mixing of realistic details which insinuate plausibility with fantastic details which belie the tale’s claim of truthful description” (28). Avid raconteurs that they are, Falstaff and Burton seem to know all this intuitively, and they pace their stories with a steady insinuation of believability, always mindful of their narrative stance in relation to their audiences. Their tales clearly are (at least partially) concocted; what is more important than the objective truth of events is the narrative artistry—the proficiency at artful exaggeration, inventive elaboration, and a delivery that superficially conveys the tales as true.

As with tall tales generally, the narrators strive to maintain an air of believability, even if the events are fantastic, and even as the narrators self-consciously fashion outlandish exaggerations and absurdities. Nothing stands in the way of a well-constructed lie as it gains energy: proficient narrators of Falstaff’s and Burton’s mettle can hardly contain themselves as their lying tales accelerate. The accumulating contradictions that sometimes accompany the runaway lie do not hinder its momentum, since the seasoned liar automatically ignores those incongruities in order to continue his description of more incredible events. Rhetorical effect is more important than the minor inconsistencies.⁸ Falstaff and Burton excel in all of these techniques, and their command narrative performances proceed just so, amid the staged interruptions and challenges of bystanders.

As Falstaff begins, there is no question that he holds the narrative prerogative at the tavern:

Falstaff

Thou knowest my old ward: here I lay, and thus I bore my point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me.

Prince What, four? Thou saidst but two even now.

Falstaff Four, Hal. I told thee four.

Poins Ay, ay, he said four.

Falstaff These four came all afront and mainly thrust at me. I made no more ado but took all their seven points in my target, thus.

Prince Seven? Why, there were but four even now.

Falstaff In buckram?

Poins Ay, four, in buckram suits.

Falstaff Seven, by these hilts, or I am a villain else.

Prince [Aside to Poins] Prithee let him alone. We shall have more anon.

Falstaff Dost thou hear me, Hal?

Prince Ay, and mark thee too, Jack.

Falstaff Do so, for it is worth the list'ning to. . . . These nine in buckram that I told thee of—

Prince So, two more already.

Falstaff Their points being broken—

Poins Down fell their hose.

Falstaff Began to give me ground; but I followed me close, came in, foot and hand, and with a thought seven of the eleven I paid.

Prince O monstrous! Eleven buckram men grown out of two!

Falstaff But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me; for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldest not see thy hand. (II.4.194-224)

Burton's story unfolds similarly, though not with the rhetoric of fights and swordplay. He employs the familiar idiom and setting of the courtroom in relating to his peers the tale he calls "The Earthquake." He recalls trying a case in Kentucky, a suit for breach of promise of marriage that had sparked considerable interest for locals in the county. All the townspeople turned out to hear Burton's flamboyant closing arguments. "I had been speaking about three hours and a half," he says self-assuredly, "and had just got to my full speed—the genius licks were falling pretty heavy." He had swayed his jury, he claims, by "stirring up their consciences with a long pole" (163). The dramatic conflict arises as another jury, sequestered upstairs at the courthouse deliberating a separate case, wished to come down into the grand jury room to hear

Burton's oration. But the sheriff refused to let them out. "One of them," Burton continues, "kicked at the door so hard that the jar broke the stove-pipe off from the wires in the Mason's Lodge-room above, and about forty yards of stove-pipe, about as thick round as a barrel, came lumbering over the banisters, and fell, with a crash like thunder, in the grand jury-room below, and then came rolling down stairs, four steps at a leap, bouncing like a rock from a mountain side" (167-168). Additionally, the jury members and numerous witnesses came clamoring down the steps "like so many wild buffalo," amid general cries of "earthquake," "fire," and even "murder." In the mayhem, the courtroom itself began to collapse and Burton recalls his own harrowing escape: "I bowed my neck and jumped leap-frog through the window, carried the sash out on my neck, up street, bleeding like a butcher, and shouting murder at every jump. I verily thought I never should see supper time" (169-170).⁹

In this way, Falstaff and Burton immerse themselves in the story-telling domain where they are most comfortable; through it all, they continue their yarns, with explicit details about the participants, the events, the setting. Importantly, their tales are more than just compilations of exaggeration. For Mody Boatright in "The Art of Tall Lying," simple pathological exaggeration in itself is "neither folkish nor funny" and does not necessarily constitute a successful lying tale. Rather, practiced folk liars like Falstaff and Burton must depend additionally on "ludicrous imagery, an ingenious piling up of epithets, a sudden transition, a *non sequitur*—something besides mere exaggeration" if the audience is to respond to the tale (72). Ironically, lying tales are somewhat self-destructive in that they become increasingly encumbered, ultimately to the point of collapsing, under the weight of their own accumulated absurdities. But the most effective tales, manipulated by skillful narrators, reach their climax before the inevitable collapse. Boatright further explains how the moment of peak suspense creates a critical pause, at which point the listener may be tempted to question the narrator. The answer may be a "sell," Boatright adds, a hint that the hearer has been duped—"not necessarily in the sense that he believed what has gone before, but in the sense that he has not yet discovered the catch" (74). With regard to Falstaff's story, Hal begins to point out its apparent contradictions (for instance, Falstaff claims to have ascertained the color of his attackers' clothes, despite the fact that it was too dark to see his own hand). Burton is similarly challenged by his colleague, Sam Watson, who inquires as to how such a long stove pipe could conceivably tumble down a "pair of stairs," suggesting sardonically that it must

be because the staircases of Kentucky courthouses are “broader . . . than a turnpike road” (168). Even as they are met by such defiance, however, Falstaff and Burton continue to control their narrative situations. Well versed in the mechanisms of lying, they may perceive that the collapse of their stories is imminent. Consequently, they exploit even the presumed discrepancies to manage the narratives on their own terms, employing a tall tale convention that Boatright calls a “lookout,” a way of regaining narrative momentum in the face of challenges.¹⁰

Hal finally attempts to suppress Falstaff by telling his own account of the theft at Gad’s Hill. Juxtaposed to Falstaff’s narrative extravagance, Hal’s version is economical, a “plain tale” just as he promises. But the revelation does not necessarily put Hal in a position of control. From the beginning it was understood that Falstaff, if given the opportunity, would create an “incomprehensible” lie, and in that effort he does not disappoint; therefore, disclosure that he is now lying is superfluous inasmuch as that fact is already known among the members of this group. In a way, Hal undoes *himself* with the revelation, as the model of some American tall tales suggests. James E. Caron argues that “the listener who declares he has *caught* a tall tale raconteur lying reveals his naiveté as much as the listener who swallows the lie whole: the narrative itself declares the lie” (29).¹¹ To be sure, Falstaff’s lies are self-conscious, hardly unobtrusive. All along he has brazenly exhibited contradiction, in a sense inviting attention to it. Ronald R. MacDonald asserts that Falstaff’s narrative exaggerations in the tavern “are clearly designed to be seen through”:

He isn’t lying, he claims implicitly, but spinning a yarn, and to accuse a yarnspinner of lying is to make yourself look something of a sore-headed spoilsport. One of the weakest kinds of triumph is to think you have a caught a man in a lie, and then have him show you that he was only trying to entertain you. (31)

Falstaff employs exactly that technique to turn the moment to his advantage. With his lie presumably exposed by Hal, Falstaff quickly devises a new angle, declaring explicitly that he had known all along of the scheme and suggesting that his elaborate story was itself a fabrication, a reverse hoax on Hal and Poins. He had fled “on instinct,” he contends, only to protect the true prince. So with one cleverly defensive twist of logic, Falstaff signifies that his lie is simply another practical joke among friends. In a way, Falstaff is self-consciously providing entertainment in that he knows he is telling a lying tale, he enjoys doing

so, and he does not really care if Hal has been taken in or not. On top of that, by posturing as the ranking prankster, he makes a final assertion of authority among his peers.

Burton proceeds similarly and he just as effectively claims dominion over the narrative event. He responds to Sam Watson's suspicions matter-of-factly: "Of course, I meant that [the stove pipe] onjointed, and one or more of the joints rolled down. A loose, gangling fellow like you, Sam, ought to see no great difficulty *in any thing* being onjointed. I could just unscrew you" (168). So Burton, seeming effortless, defuses the verbal challenge and retorts with a personal insult. The world of the tall tale and its accompanying one-upmanship generously allows for this sort of *ad hominem* rhetoric. Narrators employ it deftly to neutralize disputation. That is to say, the elaborate stories in these social settings are logically paired with spirited invectives, and it follows naturally that the wit and verbal dexterity making one a convincing liar also equips him well to deliver playful and pointed insults. Burton's characterization of Old Judge Ramkat, for example, who presided over the case in question and who was widely known for his proclivity for exorbitant fining (of Burton in particular), is festooned with colorful images. He describes the judge as "the bloodiest tyrant alive," an "old cuss," and later in the story, as his language becomes more inflated, Burton calls him "a little, bald-headed, high-heel-booted, hen-pecked son of thunder!" (165) Again, this rhetorical style finds a ready-made model in the florid oratory of Falstaff, who is the most gifted insulter in all of Shakespeare. In one memorable string of epithets, he attacks Hal's leanness: "'Sblood, you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you bull pizzle, you stockfish—O for breath to utter what is like thee!—you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bowcase, you vile standing tuck!" (II.4.244-48). Why Hal's thinness should be a matter inviting insult, besides the simple fact that it contrasts him to Falstaff, may appear curious in itself. As with Burton's ranting hyperbole, it seems that the topic of contention is less important than the showiness and rhetorical effect of the insults.

Falstaff's rhetorical tactics invite comparison with another tall tale orator from the American frontier, Davy Crockett, who is deservedly often regarded as the quintessential American liar. The correlation is clear in their frequent use of a figure of speech I call contrastive lying, which involves denying one insidious lie by setting it over against an overtly absurd lie (typically following the structural pattern "if not A, then B"). This technique is a shrewd claim to truth telling, an important component for tall tales, which are sometimes called "stretchers" for the very fact that they systematically "stretch" the truth further and further

with continued narration. Note Falstaff's use of the figure in his prologue to the story recounting the robbery at Gad's Hill:

<i>Prince</i>	Speak, sirs. How was it?
<i>Gadshill</i>	We four set upon some dozen--
<i>Falstaff</i>	Sixteen at least, my lord.
<i>Gadshill</i>	And bound them.
<i>Peto</i>	No, no, they were not bound.
<i>Falstaff</i>	You rogue, they were bound, every man of them, or I am a Jew else, an Ebrew Jew.
<i>Gadshill</i>	As we were sharing, some six or seven fresh men set upon us—
<i>Falstaff</i>	And unbound the rest, and then come in the other. (II.4.173-83)

Falstaff fortifies his account of the event by counterposing it with the preposterous image of himself as a Jew, and he utilizes the device again just two lines later to give credibility to the outrageously exaggerated number of assailants he claims joined in the fray: "if I fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish! If there were not two or three and fifty upon poor old Jack, then I am no two-legged creature" (II.4.185-88).¹² The contrast of Falstaff's corpulent body to a cluster of radish stems, long and lean, is sufficiently absurd for the necessary rhetorical effect. This technique of contrastive lying later became a mainstay in the frontier brags of Davy Crockett, who, like Falstaff, saw the power of constructing a public image with flamboyant narratives about personal exploits.

Crockett was a real person, a pioneer from Tennessee who served several (largely ineffectual) terms in the U.S. Congress in the 1820s and 1830s (at the very same time that Baldwin was accumulating legal experience in Alabama and Mississippi). By the time of Crockett's death at the Alamo in 1836, he had become an icon of the American frontier spirit, largely because of his swaggering personality and penchant for self-indulgent storytelling. His image continued to grow for twenty years after his death, during which time the comic Crockett almanacs remained popular.¹³

One anecdote from the Crockett almanacs, "Lodging in Kansas," tells about the curious habit of folks from the Kansas territory sleeping while hanging from the lower limbs of a tree. "This is a downright fact," argues Crockett. "If it ain't, take my narves for telegraph wires" (41). On another occasion, Crockett describes a vicious street fight with a double-dealing Kentucky squatter. He concludes the graphic story this way: "Some of the folks talked of putting me up for President bekase I

showed myself a military hero; and if this rencounter don't make me one, thar's no snakes in Varginy, or weazels in the Allegany mountains" (84). Crockett relates an anecdote about a creature that is "half wolf, half man, and tother half sawmill." After staring down the carnivorous eating machine, Crockett says, "if the critter didn't draw up his under-lip, and fall to eating off the bark of a tree, while his eyes watered along with his mouth, then take my whiskers for wolf skins" (125). In a more civilized setting, Crockett delivers a speech to congress "On the state of finances, state officers, and state affairs in general"; he closes the colorful harangue by saying "Mr. Speaker, the nation can no more go ahead under such state o'things, than a fried eel can swim upon the steam o'a tea kettle; if it can, then take these yar legs for yar hall pillars" (151).

Related to this figure of speech is Falstaff's lying technique of inviting the listener to perform some insult or bodily harm should the story be proven false. As he goads the prince: "I tell thee what, Hal—if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me a horse."¹⁴ Again, some Crockett tall tales demonstrate analogous methods of lying. Of a battle against Santa Ana and his men, Crockett boasts, "an'if I didn't make Mexican heads fly about as thick as horsechestnuts in a hurrycane then melt me into iron for steambilers" (93). Another tale ends with Crockett saying, "if they didn't, then grind me up for cannon fodder" (85). Both of these rhetorical techniques have been considered tropes of Crockett's particular brand of lying. But, as noted, they appear with notable frequency in *1 Henry IV*. As might be expected, Falstaff utilizes the devices most adeptly to expedite a lie he has just told, and also to create ambiguity around his own identity. Elsewhere, Falstaff employs the contrastive lying technique to liken himself to a "shotten herring," "a soused gurnet," "a peppercorn," and a "brewer's horse." These images advance the lie of the moment, but they also contribute to the ambiguities of Falstaff's shifting identity. Even his name changes as he is addressed by his compatriots in the tavern. They refer to him as Jack, Sir John Sack and Sugar, Sir John Paunch, Monsieur Remorse, and my old lad of the castle. Like his lies, Falstaff's identity is slippery, and that is partly what makes him such a captivating character. His "ever-altering personae," James P. Driscoll notes, shows Falstaff's awareness that "a man must adapt apparent identity to situation to survive and prosper in an unpredictable world" (40). Adaptability and equivocation aside, Falstaff finds his survival and prosperity in this kingdom seriously threatened as Hal advances toward the throne.

This essay is an exercise in intertextuality in that it considers how one text can bear upon the understanding of another. No piece of liter-

ature exists in isolation; and with that in mind, we can recognize that folkloristic insight offers a larger cultural awareness informing the reading of any given literary text. That has been my goal here. Clearly, in the character of Falstaff, Shakespeare heralded the narrative style of tall tale raconteurs in American literature, who themselves were drawn upon folk models. Falstaff's command performance at the Boar's Head Tavern demonstrates that Shakespeare was mindful of traditional patterns of the tall tale, including verisimilitude, deliberate lying, first person narration, audience interruptions, repeated formulaic devices, male-centered interaction, and mock belief by listeners. Baldwin was savvy to emulate Shakespeare's extant literary prototype (his specific allusion to *1 Henry IV* makes that borrowing unmistakable). And it is difficult to imagine that Crockett would have developed his signature lying techniques entirely independent of some exposure to the apparent precursors in Shakespeare's play. These are only two of the several American southern writers who mirrored themes and episodes from *1 Henry IV* or who modeled characters directly on Falstaff.¹⁵ Contrary to popular belief, the tall tale did not appear strictly on the American frontier. Hundreds of years before, Shakespeare recognized the dramatic possibilities embedded in the expressive lie, with its accompanying social tensions and jockeying for power. As we now know, *1 Henry IV* was a sort of Anglo-prototype for these elements that would later figure prominently in boasts of American yarnspinners.

Endnotes

¹ Dorson, *Davy Crockett: An American Comic Legend*, p. 137. All subsequent quotations of Davy Crockett are from Dorson. Page references will appear in the text.

² See Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Longbow: New England Popular Tales and Legends*.

³ Thompson, p. 216.

⁴ Based on his extensive fieldwork in Ireland, for example, Henry Glassie makes a strong case in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* for the Irish heritage of tall tale telling (pp. 49 ff. and notes, pp. 737-740). Though under-represented in printed Irish tale collections, these comic tales attached to "extravagant personalities" have a rich tradition in Irish oral culture. "The rarity of the tall tale in Irish collections," Glassie notes, "might tell as much about the interests of the collectors as about the interests of the tellers" (740). Gustav Henningsen's "The Art of Perpendicular Lying" shows a vibrant culture of tall tale telling in Sweden. In discussing the long heritage of tall tales in Europe, Carolyn S.

Brown in *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature* traces the long history of one common tall tale motif—"Lie: words freeze" (X1632.2; also 1632.2.1. "Frozen words thaw out in spring"). The motif, Brown notes, was probably first recorded by Plutarch around the first Century A.D. Castiglione later incorporated the same motif into his *Book of the Courtier* in 1528. In the North American tradition of tall tales, thawing out frozen words became a recurring motif in the histrionic narratives and lying contests of frontier braggarts. A number of the texts in *La Nouvelle Fabrique des Excellents Traite de Vérité (The New Fabrication of Some Excellent Truths)*, originally published in France in 1579 under the pseudonym Philippe d'Alcripe, could be classified under the heading "Tales of Lying" in Aarne and Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* (see Thomas, *The Tall Tale and Philippe D'Alcripe*). Later, in 1785, German professor Rudolph E. Raspe published his collection of *Münchhausen* tales, which became immensely popular in Europe and America, and crystallized a form that stood as a literary prototype for the American tall tale.

⁵ Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches*, pp. 155-57. All subsequent quotations from Baldwin are from this edition. Page references will appear in the text.

⁶ Poggio, vol. 2, pp. 230-33.

⁷ In *1 Henry IV*, Hostess Quickly can arguably be included in the group; she partakes in some of the fun and is a confederate to the fellows in the tavern when court and law officials later interrupt. To fit in, though, she seems de-feminized. In Act III, Falstaff, believing the hostess has robbed him, delivers a curious insult to her: "I'll be sworn my pocket was picked. Go to, you are a woman, go!" to which she responds, "Who, I? No; I defy thee! God's light, I was never called so in mine own house before!" (I.3.59-63). The hostess knows enough to be leery of Falstaff's insinuations, but she cannot match the level of his wit and knowledge. He manipulates that differential power in their exchange, actually delivering harmless gibes in the manner of biting insults. But his innocuous aspersions implicitly de-humanize as well as de-feminize Mistress Quickly. He calls her "a thing to thank God on" and then quips, "setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise" (III.3.117, 122-23).

⁸ See Bauman, p. 30.

⁹ It is worth noting that Burton, like Falstaff, sees the real danger in terms of a potentially lost meal. To be sure, Burton regards a rejuvenated appetite—his own or someone else's—as the key indicator of a proper recovery. As he explains of one of the casualties of the "earthquake," a tinner's boy, Tom Tyson, "has his skull fractured; but they put silver in the cracks, and he got over it—a few brains spilled out, or something of the sort—but his appetite was restored" (174).

¹⁰ Boatright summarizes one tale exemplifying such an ending:

A man describes a dense forest. The trees were so thick that he could barely make his way on foot, much less on horseback. Other details follow. Animal life abounds. It is a hunter's paradise. There

are bears and deer, but elk are especially numerous. Why, he'd seen hundreds with an antler-spread of fifteen feet.

"But," asks the listener, "if the timber is as thick as you say, how did the elk get through the forest?"

"That's your lookout." (74)

In this way, the alert tall tale narrator is never caught off guard by the challenges of listeners. Rather, he can manipulate those challenges to work for his narrative purposes.

¹¹ See also Miller, p. 34.

¹² Several critics have suggested that Falstaff's settling on fifty-three as the number of attackers is not random. It was widely believed that Sir Richard Grenville faced fifty-three Spanish ships at the battle of the Azores in 1591, and thus Falstaff implicitly associates his negligible fight near Gad's Hill with a popular national epic (see Mack, p. 82n; and Stewart).

¹³ Sadly, a number of the almanacs were created by hack writers who sometimes bastardized the vivacious, colorful tall tale tradition into a form "repetitive in structure, uneven in artistry, and primitive in the evocation of [tall tale] narrative context" (Brown, p. 54). Nevertheless, some of the tall tales in the almanacs capture the genuine folk tradition. Richard Dorson's *Davy Crockett: American Comic Legend* presents from the almanacs a scattering of tales representing the best of the series. For a thorough examination of Davy Crockett's personal and political history, related folklore, and media constructions of the Crockett legend, see Michael A. Lofaro ed., *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy, 1786-1986*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.

¹⁴ By the end of the scene, Hal and Peto have essentially complied with the last part of Falstaff's request. After barely eluding arrest by the sheriff, Falstaff is discovered, Peto observes, "Fast asleep behind the arras, and snorting like a horse" (II.4.529-30; see Watson, 293-94).

¹⁵ Notably, Porgy of the South Carolina Partisans, appearing in five of William Gilmore Simms' romances, is a rotund, loquacious glutton, whose initial appearance in *The Partisan* (1835) explicitly evokes the social context of the lying tales in *1 Henry IV*. Porgy enters as the gregarious sort, entertaining himself by talking about food, just "as Falstaff discoursed of his own cowardice without feeling it" (Simms, 110). Salient allusions to *1 Henry IV* appear also in the poetry of Henry Timrod, as well as in the fiction of Mark Twain and William Faulkner. (See, respectively, Christina Murphy, "The Artistic Design of Societal Commitment: Shakespeare and the Poetry of Henry Timrod," [p. 34]; Thomas Richardson, "Is Shakespeare Dead? Twain's Irreverent Question" [pp.66-7]; and Timothy Kevin Conley, "Faulkner's Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Faulkner," [pp.106,111], all in Philip C. Kolin, *Shakespeare and Southern Writers: A Study in Influence*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985.)

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"Water Ways" in North Carolina: Representing Maritime Communities at the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

~ by Betty J. Belanus

On any given day of the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, men and women from North Carolina's maritime communities could be observed laboring beneath white tents in the heart of Washington, D.C. During the first five days of the summer program—"Water Ways: Mid-Atlantic Maritime Communities"—they erected an Alligator River duck blind. They built (and sailed) a Harkers Island sprit sail skiff, entered (and won) a decoy carving contest. They explained trapping and pound net fishing, delivered tales and songs about "Down East," North Carolina, and organized a Sunday worship service. During the second five days, they made crab pots, repaired menhaden nets, steamed shrimp, and funneled eager children through a dragger net. For ten days, thousands of visitors to the nation's Capitol were educated and entertained with glimpses into North Carolina's rich coastal culture. In return, these North Carolinians were rewarded in a manner that caught some by surprise. "No one who attended the Festival gained more than we did,"



The 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall, looking east toward the Washington Monument. The skipjack in the foreground is the *Joy Parks*, a sixty-seven foot workboat used for Chesapeake Bay oyster dredging.
Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

recalled Karen Willis Amspacher. “We came as participants, and were expected to be the givers and sharers of our heritage. But what transpired in the process was a renewal of our own heritage within us and among us.”

What did it take to get this compact crew—and the objects and materials they needed—to relocate temporarily, to exchange their marshes and sounds for the crowds and traffic of the National Mall? How were these particular people chosen? What, in addition to having a well-developed sense of humor, was necessary to navigate the inevitable storms and shoals, the mysteries and surprises of producing a large, research-based folklife festival?

Choosing Themes and Communities: What to fish for?

Having curated a number of festival programs in the past, I knew the components of a good one: people with a profound sense of the place where they lived and worked; visually interesting crafts and occupational skills; music that told a story; good local cooks for food demonstrations. And great “talkers” to help explain the past, describe the present, and maybe divine the future of their communities. In addition, I was aware of the vast amount of mid-Atlantic fieldwork that has been completed by folklorists, museum staff members, local arts and environmental organizations, and many others during the last twenty years. I thought of myself as a fisherman new to a particular body of water. I needed to consult with other fishermen about what the catch was like and where to find the best fish. So, in the Fall of 2000, I began by exploring the subject with colleagues who had done substantial maritime research and presentation.

The first step was to locate the most promising fishing grounds. The coasts of Long Island, New York, New Jersey and, of course, the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays were prime. North Carolina’s Outer Banks also loomed large, but not everyone agreed that these ribbons of sand, their inshore sounds, and offshore waters qualify as “mid-Atlantic.” However, Elaine Eff of the Maryland Historical Trust and Maryland Traditions convinced me early-on that, despite what anyone said, I *had* to include North Carolina, or at least Harkers Island. She had earlier been a consultant for the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center, and knew that the folks there would embody the story I had in mind. Wayne Martin, Folklife Director of the North Carolina Arts Council, also agreed that the state should be represented in the program, and that Harkers Island/Down East was a good choice for inclusion.



Lonnie Ray Sykes from Alligator, North Carolina, explaining the design of an Albemarle Sound crab pot to Festival visitors. *Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.*

So North Carolina joined five other states—New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia—and we cast off. Because there are so many different stories to tell, it became clear that the program should include at least two “case studies” from each state. It was apparent that all of the communities faced some of the same issues: over-development; loss of coastal habitat and pollution; fishing restrictions and reduced catches; cultural change and a dwindling number of older maritime craftspeople.

The next step in North Carolina was choosing a community that would compliment Harkers Island. We asked folklorists to help. With the aid of a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, folklorist Jill Hemming took on this task. She devoted months to exploring archival materials and conducting new fieldwork. By mutual consent, Jill, Wayne Martin, and I chose the Albemarle Sound region, specifically the area around Columbia, North Carolina. Serendipitously, as the Festival project developed, The Conservation Fund had a complimentary project underway in the nearby Alligator community. Named for its proximity to the Alligator River, this community is technically part of Columbia. The Conservation Fund project included interviews with African-American storytellers, musicians, hunters and trappers, and crabbers. It was conducted by folklorist Sharon Clarke, who was invited to share her research

on potential Festival participants from Alligator, and thereby helped extend the scope of Jill's work.

Knitting the Net(work)

I now had my core "fishing crew." In keeping with the maritime theme, what I thought of as the net(work) needed to be done. It is not enough just to choose a community and go after it the way that a fisherman might choose a particular species to target. Unlike fish, people have a say in whether or not they should be "netted" into a project. A community infrastructure needs to be built, and community members must be consulted, and then persuaded to participate. The "lure" of having your community represented at one of the premier cultural festivals in the United States is bright at first glance. But the flash often disappears once people discover how much work the event will demand.

Key members of the communities saw the opportunity to tell their stories as worth the effort, and came "on board." On Harkers Island, Karen Willis Amspacher and Pam Morris from the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center joined Connie Mason from the North Carolina Maritime Museum as anchors. In Columbia, Feather Phillips and the staff of Pocosin Arts teamed up with the researchers and staff of the environmental organization, Partnership for the Sounds. Scott Whitesides of the Manteo branch of the North Carolina Maritime Museum and many others also enlisted and helped keep the project afloat.

Subsequently, I visited both communities. I met my crew personally and thereby began to envision the people who collectively would put a human face on the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Attending cultural events at the Waterfowl Musuem also helped. I assisted Pam in the reconstruction of a duck blind (inside the museum). These and other impromptu, first-hand activities allowed me to interact with and get to know some of the potential participants of our Festival. Pam and Karen ferried me across Back Sound to Cape Lookout lighthouse, and this experience conveyed the magnificence of a seascape that we would attempt to convey in Washington. With Jill Hemming, I toured the back roads of the Columbia area, walked out on Albemarle Sound's docks, and visited fishermen in their workshops. We also conducted an open informational meeting at the Columbia Theater Cultural Resources Center, which was attended by a variety of grassroots leaders, tradition bearers, and two yachts-full of curious tourists. But it was smelling the salt air and marsh mud, enjoying local seafood, and hearing the accents

of both regions, that really made the North Carolina portion of the Festival come alive in my mind.¹

Casting the Net and Hauling It Back

Since we had not yet decided exactly what and whom to feature, our first directive was to "cast the net wide." We therefore established broad categories: Commercial and Recreational Fishing; Boat Building; Sailing Vessels; Shore Memories; Keeping the Waters Safe; Marsh Life; Maritime Kitchen; an educational learning center called "Kids' Coast;" and a discussion stage to be labeled "Bayhouse Stories." We then asked folklorists and community members to identify good candidates for participation.

Volleys of e-mails were exchanged between me and the various people who suggested participants. We had our "favorites," but for one reason or another, the process of selection took its toll. We mourned the folks who were "culled out"—the potential participants whom we couldn't bring because of lack of funds, or the ones who "got away" because their health or age would not allow them to join us.

A couple of success stories brightened the gloom. Everyone on Harkers Island and in Columbia agreed that Earl Carawan, a fine old-time musician hailing from Hyde County, should be invited to the Festival. Hyde County roughly borders Carteret and Tyrrell, the home counties of our case study communities. But Earl Carawan had recently lost his brother, Max, to cancer, and could not play alone. So he initially declined the invitation. After several phone conversations, Jill discovered that another musical brother, Leland (who had moved to Missouri), was enthusiastic about coming East and accompanying Earl. So the Carawan Brothers performed once more, and the Festival offered both a family reunion and a chance to heal from the loss of a loved one.²

Octogenarian shad fisherman Melvin Twiddy (also from Hyde County but close to the Tyrrell County line) was touch and go. First, he said he was too "old and feeble." But the North Carolina Maritime Museum agreed to transport a full-sized shad boat to Washington, and we told Melvin that his expertise was necessary to explain the significance of the vessel to landsmen in the Capitol. And since the shad boat is North Carolina's official "state boat," we also told Melvin he would be representing the state and region where his family has lived for generations. We had Melvin on board, but then we grounded on a shoal: due to the time and expense it would take to transport the boat, the North Carolina Maritime Museum had to back out. No one else had a shad boat they were willing to lend, but we weren't about to abandon this par-

ticular ship. More e-mail volleys ensued. There was lobbying. Shuffling of funds, time, and personnel. And then the miraculous, hoped-for reversal: the shad boat was coming to Washington, after all. And so was Melvin. On the way home after the Festival, Melvin told Feather Phillips how proud he was of their celebration of North Carolina's coastal heritage. "Now," he said, "as long as there's a United States of America, we'll be a part of its history."

Once the final selections of participants were made and confirmed, we began to consider the logistical work required in moving people, materials, and equipment of all sorts hundreds of miles. There was also the work of planning the spaces they would use and the things they would do. And, of course, there was the job of getting everyone and everything back home again. While we had the luxury of several years' worth of planning for this project, no matter how early you begin, the last couple of months are always unpredictable.

One of the most difficult aspects of the preparations was collecting all of the information needed by the Festival staff who made the arrangements for travel, lodging, and meals. Since money was tight, both communities had negotiated to bring different participants for each of the five-day periods to allow more people to attend.³ This necessitated an almost complete turn-over during the two "down days" of the Festival. Add to that the fact that none of the participants from the Columbia area was coming for the whole ten days either, and we knew we faced some potentially foul weather.

But even with the logistical problems, fortunate events often befell the program. It was similar to pulling in your net and finding some unexpected but delicious fish along with your regular catch. In one case, ironically, the spring/summer crabbing season was turning out to be so successful that William Stott, an anthropologist who had been conducting extensive research on crabbing in North Carolina, had trouble identifying a Columbia area crabber (even a retired one!) willing to haul himself and his gear to Washington. We invited crab pot maker Libby Brickhouse from Columbia, but she had health problems and could not commit. We turned again to Hyde County, and approached crab pot maker Mary Helen Cox. She indicated a willingness to participate and, after a series of phone calls, I connected Mary Helen with William Stott. At the Festival, the two soon became friends and learned a lot from each another.

Meanwhile, on Harkers Island there was a question of who would represent the menhaden industry, which still supports one factory in nearby Beaufort.⁴ Pam Morris, who was handling the commercial fishing negotiations, suggested Nadine Benevides, who turned out to be a

wonderful cook as well. Nadine could only come, however, if she could bring her teenaged son, Joey. This was fine with us since we are always striving for representation by the younger generation. We then learned that Joey often went crabbing with his father. Naturally, he gravitated toward the Festival crabbing exhibit, where he learned a few pot making techniques from Mary Helen Cox.

During the first week, Lonnier Ray Sykes from Alligator, whom we originally had placed in the Marsh Life exhibit because of his hunting and trapping skills, repositioned himself in the commercial fishing area, and did a splendid job of explaining crabbing, leaving the hunting and trapping discussion to his friend and mentor, Chatmon Bryant. Chatmon, in turn, enlisted volunteers and visitors to build a duck blind. So, as it turned out, North Carolina crabbing was well-represented, complementing the crabbers from Maryland and New York. In retrospect, some things seem like they were meant to be all along.

Bringing in the Catch: Staging the Event and (hopefully) Reaping the Benefits

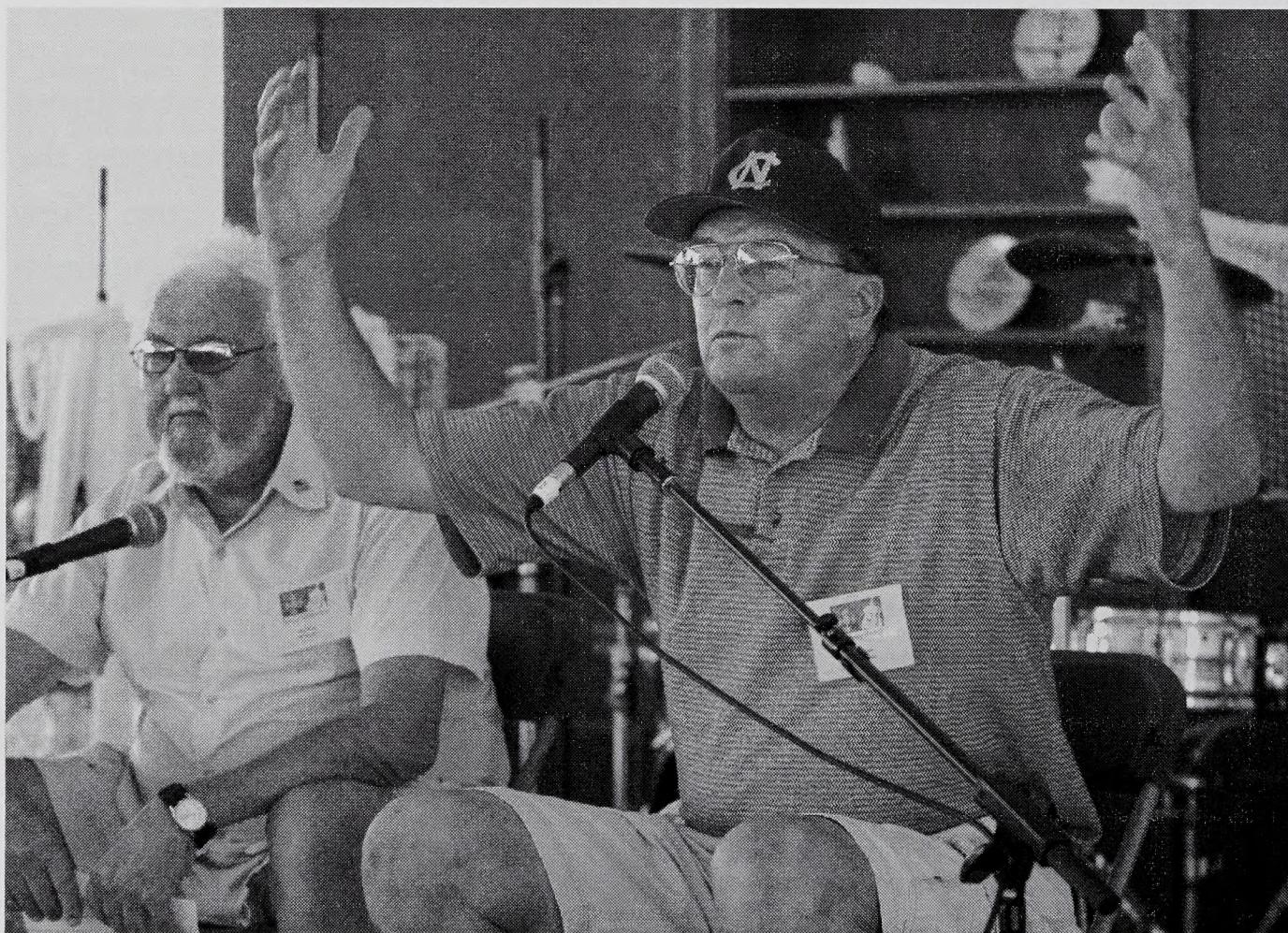
The first North Carolinians—the Harkers Island boat builders, Jimmy Amspacher and Heber Guthrie—arrived at the Festival site on June 22, the day before the opening. Their trailer was loaded down with juniper planks and other necessities for building a full-size, sixteen-foot sail skiff. They set to work immediately. They continued almost without rest for four days until their trim craft tried her sails on the Potomac the following Sunday morning. Meanwhile, their tent mates from New York’s Long Island Maritime Museum were working on the long-term project of recreating a historic cat boat. By the time Jimmy and Heber completed their sprit sail skiff, the Long Islanders had applied only a few planks to their vessel.

Unlike the Harkers Islanders who labored with a sense of urgency, the Long Island boat builders were deliberately drawing out their process, as the boat they were building served as a teaching device for their museum. They were just as committed to preserving the tradition of wooden boat building as were Jimmy and Heber. But their sense of traditions in peril from the outside world and the loss of older community craftspeople was not as apparent, perhaps because these traditions and people have already largely disappeared from working boatyards, but have found new homes in museum workshops where concerted efforts are made to preserve the skills of wooden boat builders. Heber Guthrie may have expressed the difference in work ethic succinctly when he said:

"For every board we nail to the stem, I think about all those boat builders that nobody ever heard tell of . . . the Guthries and Roses, and the Lewises and Willises."⁵

A sense of capturing tradition and passing it on through teaching and documentation was also foremost in the minds of other North Carolina participants. Commercial fisherman and educator Randy Rouse, who represented the Partnership for the Sounds, patiently guided countless children through a scale model pound net and identified the species of fish that swim and spawn in Albemarle Sound. Representatives from the Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Refuge were on hand in the "Kids' Coast" tent with a display and hands-on materials from the "7,000 Juniper" project. This project involved every elementary school child in Tyrrell County in a symbolic reforestation of Atlantic white cedar. Also known as "juniper," this is the same wood that the Harkers Island boat builders were using to make their sail skiff.

It is impossible to describe the contributions of all the North Carolina participants who came to the Festival and helped convey the sense that coastal traditions, although they are affected by many modern hazards, are alive and well. But each of these participants performed magnificently, at times under difficult circumstances.⁶



Down East "Fish House Liars," Sonny Williamson and Rodney Kemp, "telling the news" to Festival visitors. *Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.*

Back in Port—Follow-Ups

At the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, we have an old saying: "The Festival never ends." This became clear to me when I returned to the office after a much-needed vacation and received Karen Willis Amspacher's request for photographs and a personal statement for publication in the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center's *2004-2005 Yearbook*. Karen's request compelled me to think about the work that had gone into the Festival, and to consider what impact it might have made—and would continue to have—in the communities that were so ably represented.

A few weeks later, I read the *Yearbook* that Karen and her staff produced, and I was gratified by the overwhelmingly positive statements it included from Festival participants and visitors from North Carolina. I knew that their experiences had not always been smooth sailing, and everyone thought of events that "might have been," given more time, money, and energy. But these thoughts were not reflected in the kind words of the folks from Down East.

Further communications from participants from other parts of the state were positive as well. Pocosin Arts and the Pocosin Lake Wildlife Refuge were happy to have shared information about the "7,000



Born at the Smithsonian Festival, the Harkers Island sail skiff sets out on her maiden voyage toward the Potomac. *Photo courtesy of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center.*

Juniper" project, and will use the panels developed for the Festival at the Refuge to help tell the story of the fledgling juniper forest. Both the North Carolina Maritime Museum and Partnership for the Sounds were pleased with their participation.⁷

But perhaps the most moving testimonies to the success of the Festival were the hand-written thank-you notes, such as the one that the Carawans sent to our staff. They said simply that they had the "time of their lives." Karen Willis Amspacher wrote of the myriad of emotions and fearful anxieties that preceded her delegation's visit. But she also wrote of the immense pride they felt when they heard their "Fish House Liars" telling "the news" and Connie Mason lilting her ballads to grateful and receptive audiences of Americans, and to international visitors from distant parts of the world. "Of all the hundreds of thousands of people who came that week," Karen wrote, "no one learned more than we did. About ourselves—who we are and why—and that, indeed, we have a heritage worthy of our preserving." When everything was said and done, it seemed like we had a fruitful season after all.

Endnotes

¹ In addition, I also gained much from reading about the region. North Carolina has an impressive population of active writers whose works provide reliable and authoritative historical and cultural information for particular traditions and places. See, for example, the selections listed in "Recommended Reading."

² Earl and Max Carawan were recipients of the North Carolina Folklore Society's Brown-Hudson Award in 2004. For the award citation, see *NCFJ* 51.2 (Fall-Winter 2004), pp. 55-57.

³ We originally had hoped to bring up to twenty participants from each state for the full ten days of the Festival. That meant we had to find funds to cover travel, room and board, and a small stipend for each participant, as well as supplies such as food for cooking demonstrations, wood for boat building, and many other incidentals. But during the fund raising period, national, state, and private foundation money was in short supply. To make matters worse, virtually all of our North Carolina participants experienced severe losses from the floodwaters of Hurricane Isabel. Fortunately, some funding was provided by such agencies as the North Carolina Arts Council, the North Carolina Division of Tourism, and North Carolina Sea Grant. Some additional funds were secured through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Finally, community organizations did what they could to help raise local funds and make in-kind donations possible.

⁴ The Beaufort facility is the last of several large menhaden processing factories that once operated in coastal North Carolina.

⁵ The names that Heber mentions are those of legendary Harkers Island boat building families, many of whom specialized in creating wooden boats with the characteristic Harkers Island “flare” bow. Between the 1950s and 1970s, there were forty-two active boat builders on the island. Today only three full-time boat builders remain.

⁶ Participants included Joey Benevides, who represented the younger generation of fishermen and net menders; Kent Priestly, a young researcher and writer, was on hand to help Melvin Twiddy interpret his long tradition of pound netting; Scott Whitesides demonstrated spar and oar making, and described the efforts of the North Carolina Maritime Museum to preserve wooden boat building; and Connie Mason who also represented the Maritime Museum and passed on her own family traditions of Down East in story and song.

⁷ Statements of the boat builders, decoy carvers, shrimpers, storytellers, and others from North Carolina will be prominently featured in a web-based exhibition presently being developed at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Recommended Reading

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Review Essays

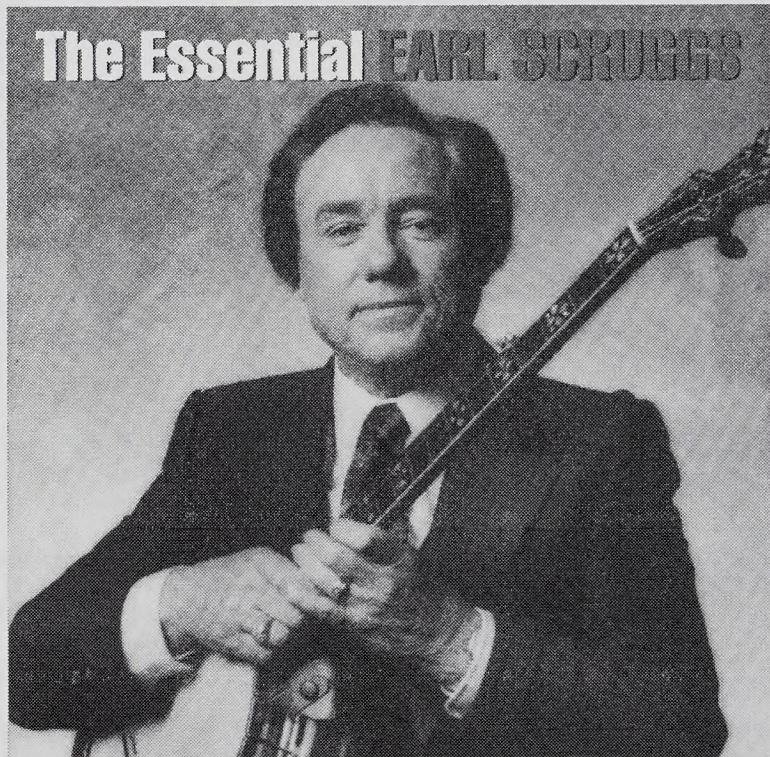
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The Essential Earl Scruggs CD

~ reviewed by Matt Meacham

Perhaps the clearest indication that an artistic innovation attains to the level of greatness is that it takes those who first encounter it by surprise and strikes them as unprecedented, yet seems so fully accordant with the idiom to which it belongs that it rapidly becomes an indispensable component of that idiom. Unfortunately, when such artistic phenomena reach the status of indispensability, that very status may prevent us from recognizing how truly innovative they were at the moment of their introduction. And this is precisely the case with the contributions of Earl Scruggs within the domains of American bluegrass performance and banjo technique. Yet Scruggs' innovations have few parallels.*

In recognition of the native North Carolinian's eightieth birthday, Sony Music released *The Essential Earl Scruggs* on its Columbia/Legacy label in March 2004. Veteran compiler Gregg Geller produced the two-compact disc set. *The Essential Earl Scruggs* takes us on a whirlwind tour of the octogenarian's career, commencing with several of his earliest recordings with Bill Monroe in the mid-1940s and spanning nearly four decades. In so doing, it enables us to recover some sense, nebulous though it may be, of just how revolutionary the sounds that emanated from Scruggs' banjo must have seemed to those who first heard them almost sixty years ago. It also reminds us of the inestimable magnitude



CD Cover image courtesy of Columbia/ Legacy, Sony Music.

*Scruggs' life and career are currently the subject of a Country Music Hall of Fame exhibit, *Banjo Man: The Musical Journey of Earl Scruggs*. Running from March 4, 2005 to June 16, 2006, the exhibit also recognizes the accomplishments of his wife and business partner, Louise Certain Scruggs.

of Scruggs' legacy, a legacy so familiar to many of us that we might be prone to take it for granted were it not for such occasional fresh glimpses of its source.

The forty selections that comprise *The Essential Earl Scruggs* conspicuously typify the instrumental styles and techniques for which Scruggs is best known and are characteristic of the phases of his career that they represent. In this sense, the anthology lives up to its title. One might argue, however, that Scruggs' versatility and the diversity of his oeuvre are equally important aspects of his "essence" that are underrepresented here. In that respect, the compilation's content seems somewhat inconsistent with its name. Despite its many admirable strengths, *The Essential Earl Scruggs* bespeaks a narrowly conventional conception of the Scruggs canon. Geller and his colleagues seem to have missed an opportunity to revise and expand that canon for the better.

Earl Scruggs was born on January 6, 1924, in the rural Cleveland County community of Flint Hill. Though his signature three-finger right-hand technique was truly his own creation, it was not without antecedents. Upon receiving a North Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1996, Scruggs remarked, "My music came up from the soil of North Carolina." The three-finger styles of such Western Piedmont banjoists as Snuffy Jenkins and George Pegram provided Scruggs' point of departure; in retrospect, the playing of Jenkins, Pegram, and their peers might be heard as a nexus between any of numerous banjo styles now classified under the "old-time" rubric and the bluegrass banjo tradition initiated by Scruggs.

Scruggs initiated that tradition, and reached a national audience for the first time, in association with a self-appointed musical ambassador from another southeastern state—Kentucky. Scruggs joined Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in 1945. Bluegrass historians have debated at length as to whether Scruggs' banjo style is a definitive feature of bluegrass music—that is, whether it is as essential to the bluegrass idiom as is the ensemble style cultivated by Monroe. Whether or not the stylistic tradition that has proceeded from Scruggs is a *definitive* component of the bluegrass idiom, there can be no doubt that it has been and remains an *integral* element of that idiom.

Furthermore, Scruggs' innovation was analogous to Monroe's in an important respect. Scruggs might be said to have done for a single instrument, the banjo, what Monroe did for an ensemble, the particular string-band configuration that was to become known as the bluegrass band. By advancing the technical caliber of ensemble performance, Monroe met the challenges with which the socio-economic moderniza-

tion of rural America and the development of a country music industry confronted his musical idiom; Scruggs met those challenges by advancing the technical caliber of banjo playing. Though their innovations did not necessarily represent conscious responses to their historical circumstances, their advancements gave currency and cogency to Monroe's and Scruggs' music in a rapidly evolving modern context. Thus, in principle, the two musicians complimented each other ideally.

The three selections with which *The Essential Earl Scruggs* begins demonstrate that Scruggs and Monroe complimented each other ideally in practice, as well. Scruggs' struttingly pointillistic upper-register banjo break in "Heavy Traffic Ahead," a bluesy shuffle whose text confidently relates the Blue Grass Boys' itinerant exploits, fits the song like a glove. The other two Monroe songs, "It's Mighty Dark to Travel" and "Molly and Tenbrooks (The Race Horse Song)," include richly textured passages of Scruggs' banjo playing in both soloistic and accompanimental roles within the ensemble texture.

Unquestionably, the examples of Scruggs' work with Monroe's band were well-chosen, but it seems disappointing that more selections—especially less readily available ones—were not included to represent this crucial phase in Scruggs' career and in the history of bluegrass. One significant omission is "Blue Grass Breakdown," a Monroe instrumental that features an incandescent banjo break and served as the prototype for Scruggs' own "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," which borrows much of its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic content from Monroe's composition.

The remainder of the first disc, as well as tracks three through ten of the second, is devoted to recordings by Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys. Scruggs founded the band in 1948 with a fellow member of the Blue Grass Boys, Tennessee guitarist and singer Lester Flatt. Despite numerous changes of personnel, Flatt and Scruggs maintained a high-profile career for more than twenty years, contributing many of what would become the staples of the bluegrass repertoire and earning a place at Monroe's right hand in the bluegrass pantheon.

There is much that is praiseworthy about the segment of *The Essential Earl Scruggs* that consists of Flatt and Scruggs recordings, but some aspects of the selection of its content seem questionable. First, much of this material is available on other compact discs. Especially puzzling is Geller's decision to include nine selections that also appear on 'Tis Sweet to Be Remembered: *The Essential Flatt and Scruggs*, another compilation in the Columbia/Legacy "Essentials" series.

Second, the collection includes many, perhaps most, of the Flatt and Scruggs instrumental numbers that are frequently cited as examples of the techniques and styles for which Scruggs, as both banjoist and composer, is best known. Consequently, this portion of the compilation is not merely imbued, but oversaturated with Scruggs' "essence" and seems rather monochromatic. Although "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," "Earl's Breakdown," "Flint Hill Special," "Foggy Mountain Chimes," "Randy Lynn Rag," and "Shuckin' the Corn" are all fine compositions, they exhibit many of the same banjo techniques and are similar in harmonic content and phrase structure. Their number could have been reduced by at least two without compromising Geller's apparent intentions, opening space for equally significant, stylistically contrasting options.

The Essential Earl Scruggs includes three selections from the 1960 album, *Foggy Mountain Banjo*: "Cripple Creek," "Reuben," and "Sally Goodwin." "Reuben" certainly belongs here, if for no other reason than that Scruggs plays it in D tuning, providing a welcome contrast to the abundance of G tuning heard thus far on this compilation. However, the other two slots might better have been filled by any of several more imaginative options: for instance, the version of "Cripple Creek" from the Flatt and Scruggs *Live at Vanderbilt University* album, the Earl Scruggs Revue's rendition of "Sally Gooding" (alternate spelling of "Goodwin") from *Live at Kansas State*; or "Fire Ball Mail" or "Ground Speed" from *Foggy Mountain Banjo*.

Geller rightly recognizes Scruggs' importance as a guitarist—one of the most fluent guitarists in the early decades of bluegrass. The anthology includes "Jimmie Brown, The Newsboy," which features Scruggs' mellifluous flatpicking, and "Georgia Buck," which highlights his fingerpicking. "Jimmie Brown" was an excellent choice, but "Georgia Buck" can hardly be described as riveting from either a compositional or a guitaristic perspective; "Preachin', Prayin', Singin'" or "I'll Be Going to Heaven Sometime" might have been better alternatives.

Despite these potential objections, much of Geller's decision-making as to the representation of Flatt and Scruggs on *The Essential Earl Scruggs* is as unassailable as the music itself. Certain works of art are neither structurally complex nor technically astounding, yet they seem so elegantly conceived and flawlessly executed as to leave no room for improvement; many of Bach's chorales, Shakespeare's sonnets, and the work of the most accomplished Seagrove potters come to mind. Several of Scruggs' achievements that can be heard in this segment also belong in that category: the sections of "Down the Road" and "Get in Line Brother" in which Scruggs' banjo is in the melodic role in the ensemble texture, as

well as the whole of “Pike County Breakdown” and “Earl’s Breakdown” (notwithstanding the deterioration of the banjo’s tuning resulting from Scruggs’ rapid lowering and raising of the strings with the tuning pegs, which inspired his invention of the now-standard Scruggs Pegs).

Of course, some performances that appear here *are* technically astounding as well as elegantly conceived: the banjo-oriented sections of “Roll in My Sweet Baby’s Arms” and the instrumentals “Flint Hill Special” (which also features imaginative fiddling by Benny Martin), “Randy Lynn Rag,” and “Shuckin’ the Corn.” Several selections also exhibit Scruggs’ compositional cleverness. In terms of form, “Foggy Mountain Special” is a simple blues-flavored shuffle. But the contour of Scruggs’ banjo melody bespeaks real ingenuity, which is not diminished by its similarity to melodies played by Scruggs in “Heavy Traffic Ahead” by Monroe, and “Don’t Get Above Your Raising” by Flatt and Scruggs. The modulations to the dominant of the home key in the sections of “Foggy Mountain Chimes” that feature banjo harmonics (the “chimes” to which the title refers) are quite inventive by early 1950s standards.

Marches, parlor songs, and other tunes in the chromatically-inflected popular-song style of the Victorian era have often been adapted successfully as bluegrass instrumentals. Scruggs’ virtuosic rendition of “Dear Old Dixie” is a superb example. A version of “John Hardy Was a Desperate Little Man” from the *Strictly Instrumental* album, in which Flatt and Scruggs collaborated with Scruggs’ fellow North Carolinian and instrumental innovator, guitarist Doc Watson, is well worth hearing. So is an endearingly quirky rendition of Bob Dylan’s “Nashville Skyline Rag” recorded near the end of the Flatt and Scruggs era.

Interpolated between the Flatt and Scruggs selections on the first disc and those on the second are two brief excerpts from Scruggs’ appearance with Hylo Brown and the Timberliners (close associates of Flatt and Scruggs) at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival. Their rendition of “Cumberland Gap,” which commences in fifth gear and only accelerates, captures the extraordinary vitality of Scruggs’ live performances from this era and is one of the highlights of *The Essential Earl Scruggs*.

Another highlight appears immediately after the portion devoted to Flatt and Scruggs: “Nashville Blues” from *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, the watershed 1972 album that united the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band with Scruggs and other luminaries of Southern vernacular music. Scruggs performs this minor-key instrumental (recorded several years earlier by Flatt and Scruggs and not to be confused with a Delmore Brothers composition of the same name) with an all-star cast: his son Randy, Norman Blake, Vassar Clements, Junior Huskey, and members of the Nitty Gritty

Dirt Band, including banjoist John McEuen, who plays in counterpoint with Scruggs at several points. “Blues” only in the sense that its prevailing effect is one of stark solemnity, “Nashville Blues” remains one of Scruggs’ foremost compositional achievements.

The next of only nine selections on *The Essential Earl Scruggs* that represent Scruggs’ post-Flatt and Scruggs career is a rendition of the Hank Williams gospel composition “I Saw the Light” from Scruggs’ aptly titled 1972 album, *I Saw the Light With Some Help From My Friends*. Featuring sons Gary and Randy, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Linda Ronstadt, and numerous other musicians, this performance, with its semi-improvisational, densely textured choral harmonies, obviously was inspired by that of the title track of the *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* album. Scruggs’ banjo parts on this recording are similar to those that he played on Roy Acuff’s version of “I Saw the Light” on *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. Though his playing on this song is not as dazzling as on many of the Flatt and Scruggs selections, it is tasteful and effective; the counterpoint between Scruggs’ banjo and the vocal melody on the second verse is particularly noteworthy.

“Some of Shelley’s Blues,” a composition by country-rock musician Mike Nesmith (a former member of The Monkees), fairly typifies the repertoire of the Earl Scruggs Revue. The Revue featured Gary and Randy Scruggs, former Flatt and Scruggs dobroist Josh Graves, and various like-minded musicians. It represented Scruggs’ attempt to synthesize bluegrass banjo playing with country-rock and folk-rock idioms and was popular among college and festival audiences in the 1970s and early 1980s. Although the Revue’s music, with its percussively unhappy marriage of Scruggs’ banjo and an incessantly prominent snare drum, now sounds somewhat dated, it represents a significant phase in Scruggs’ career and one in which he was fully invested, both emotionally and artistically.

Though “Some of Shelley’s Blues” represents the band’s work admirably, the other selections by the Revue that appear on *The Essential Earl Scruggs* seem both poorly chosen and too few in number. The decision to reformulate Bob Dylan’s “I Shall Be Released” as an uptempo honky-tonk shuffle was questionable in the first place; the decision to include the result here is doubly questionable. Likewise, “Stash It,” despite the appeal of its title, does not belong here. Composed as part of Scruggs’ soundtrack for the 1974 movie *Where the Lilies Bloom*, it might have served its purpose as accompaniment for the action of the film estimably; however, heard apart from that context, it hardly merits comparison with Scruggs’ 1950s banjo instrumentals. With its awkward-

ly amorphous phrase rhythm and bland harmonic progression, it sounds more like a pale imitation of the Scruggs style by a novice than the work of the master himself. The Revue's rendition of "I Still Miss Someone" (another version of which was recorded by Flatt and Scruggs) features a vocal performance and a brief spoken tribute to Scruggs by its composer, Johnny Cash, but is otherwise rather lackluster.

Similarly, "Song of the South" from *The Storyteller and The Banjoman*, Scruggs' 1982 collaboration with Tom T. Hall, is musically uneventful, but its inclusion in this collection seems especially appropriate. Its text relates a narrative of one family's experience of the socio-economic modernization of the rural South in the New Deal era. Scruggs' personal formation and the formation of bluegrass music are inextricably bound with that period of Southern modernization. Fittingly, *The Essential Earl Scruggs* concludes with the title track from Scruggs' 1984 album, *American-Made, World-Played*. Though somewhat overproduced in typical mid-1980s Nashvillian fashion, this simple instrumental number is charmingly nostalgic.

Although the necessity of limiting this collection to two compact discs undoubtedly made Geller's selection of its content difficult, it does seem unfortunate that none of Scruggs' work from the past twenty years is represented. Scruggs' career is far from moribund. On the contrary, 2001's *Earl Scruggs and Friends* album, featuring musicians ranging from Elton John to Melissa Etheridge to Rosanne Cash, and *The Three Pickers*, recorded live in Winston-Salem with Doc Watson and Ricky Skaggs in 2002, indicate that Scruggs still garners the utmost respect from his peers. One of the most significant lacunae in *The Essential Earl Scruggs* is the lack of any rendition of "Home Sweet Home," which Scruggs has recorded in multiple contexts. His exquisite twin-banjo performance of that selection with Béla Fleck from the latter's 1999 album, *The Bluegrass Sessions: Tales from the Acoustic Planet, Volume 2*, would have been a superb addition to this anthology.

The attractive booklet that accompanies *The Essential Earl Scruggs* features a commentary by Scruggs himself, written in his ingratiatingly modest, polite-yet-informal style. He offers contextual information about a number of the recordings included in the collection and shares his own perspective on many of the milestones in his career. The booklet also includes numerous well-chosen photographs representing multiple stages of Scruggs' career and a brief, well-crafted synopsis of that career by Rich Kienzle. Additionally, the packaging incorporates a heartfelt tribute to Scruggs by Béla Fleck in which Fleck describes his first encounter with the master's music: "For me the world stood still

until the banjo playing had ended. It held my attention totally, as if I were under a spell."

The awe inspired by an initial encounter with a revolutionary artistic phenomenon—as Fleck describes it—often proves impossible to recapture once that phenomenon has become an integral part of the idiom with which it is associated. Nevertheless, by beginning with the first Scruggs recordings that reached a national audience and briskly surveying almost forty years of his multifaceted career, *The Essential Earl Scruggs* provides at least a fleeting impression of Scruggs' initial impact and reacquaints us with the enormity of his legacy. Arguably, Geller based his selection of the content of this collection on too narrow an interpretation of the word "essential," including only the most canonical and characteristic exemplars of Scruggs' best-known attributes and inadequately representing his stylistic and technical versatility. Despite that, *The Essential Earl Scruggs* undeniably exhibits the qualities that have made Earl Scruggs a star in the fullest sense of the word.

The Essential Earl Scruggs. Two compact discs (40 tracks, 105:07), Columbia/Legacy, Sony Music, 2004.

Listening for a Life

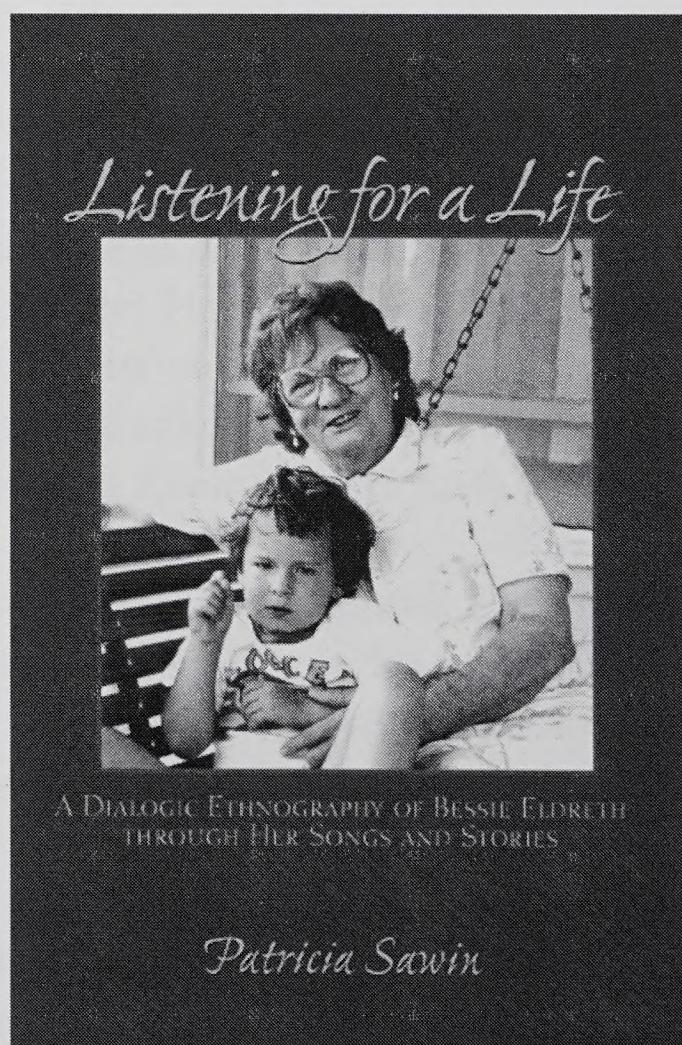
by Patricia Sawin

~ reviewed by Joyce Joines Newman

In *Listening for a Life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth through Her Songs and Stories*, folklorist Patricia Sawin examines the life of Bessie Mae Eldreth of Watauga County, North Carolina. Sawin first met Eldreth at the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C., in 1987, and chose Eldreth as the subject of her folklore doctoral dissertation at Indiana University, which she has expanded into this book.

Listening for a Life is not a book for the lay reader, but situates itself clearly within the arena of postmodern discourse theory as it is enacted in poststructuralist feminist "ethnographic" practice. Postmodern theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, and psychiatrist Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan reject the modernist view of identity as a static and stable "I" and treat identity and culture as fluid, ever-changing processes of active self-creation, the repeated performance of a self through communicative acts that occur within the contexts of various "discourses" or sets of expectations and responses established by one's previous and anticipated communications. From that perspective, Sawin's goal in this book is to examine the process through which Eldreth uses song-singing and story-telling to enact an identity for herself.

As a reviewer, I think it's important that you know my relationship to the book. I am a participant in mountain culture—one of the folk—and, as such, I have been the subject of folklore studies. But I have also studied folklore, and worked as a folklorist during the 1970s and 1980s. I am more recently an artist, and became interested in postmodern theory through art



Cover illustration courtesy of Utah State University Press.

history and literature. I was eager to read *Listening for a Life*. I was interested in and even intrigued by Sawin's discussions of Eldreth's self-enactment through her ghost stories and song repertory. In the end, though, this book disturbs me as a mountaineer and makes me uneasy as a folklorist. I'd like to suggest why.

Sawin describes her work as "an ethnography of subject formation" (1), but this is not an ethnography in the traditional sense, operating on the level of *ethnos* and addressing characteristics of groups of people. The book is focused closely on one person. It originated, according to Sawin, in "about a dozen particularly revealing interviews, intimate conversations that Eldreth and I conducted, with the tape recorder running, at her kitchen table or in her bedroom" (13). I have never seen nor met Eldreth, and cannot address the authenticity of Sawin's re-presentation of her. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this is a re-presentation of Eldreth—not Eldreth's performance of herself. Although Sawin stresses that its derivation is a dialogue, that dialogue was between two people of unequal social and economic power, just as most previous folkloristic re-presentations of mountain people have been and will continue to be.

Sawin emphasizes that she has abandoned "the notion that Eldreth could be considered an example of or participant in something we could call 'Appalachian culture'" (3); in fact, Eldreth herself resists that label. Sawin stresses that Eldreth "is neither a major historical actor nor a 'representative Appalachian woman.' She is a person doing what every person does, enacting a self" (2). Despite this disclaimer, Sawin references her own underlying assumptions about mountain culture and frequently extrapolates from Eldreth's life to characterize or comment on the culture in general. Her knowledge of the culture appears to have been derived mostly from research in the scholarship of Appalachia that she herself questions, and her characterization of mountain culture, to me, is often negative.

I suggest that this is because of the larger academic discourses within which Sawin's work exists. Sawin emphasizes the fact that in their conversations Eldreth speaks to more listeners than those present: "... she inevitably constructs a self rhetorically in relation not only to her current listeners but also to prior interlocutors and to the discourses that are the sedimented and internalized forms of social attitudes expressed in the past" (4). As an academic, Sawin does the same. One important discourse that informs her work is the discourse of feminism. Secondly, Sawin is speaking within the revisionist discourse of the "new Appalachian historiography" (xii) that claims that early scholars of the

region romanticized it and that folklorists have mistakenly allowed themselves to “see the world of the socially marginalized in wholly positive terms” (3). In *Listening for a Life*, Sawin is responding to these anticipated feminist and folklorist audiences, and that shapes her presentations of Eldreth and of mountain culture in important ways.

For example, Sawin posits that Eldreth’s self-enactment was limited by “an unabashedly patriarchal society” (1) until the death of Eldreth’s husband in 1976. Sawin re-presents Eldreth as a victim, controlled and silenced by her husband, complicit in her own victimization. Based on postmodern theory that cultural transformation can occur through the introduction of alternative models that can be incorporated into one’s self-enactment (5), Sawin argues that Eldreth’s emergence as “an empowered speaker” occurred late in her life, and attributes the change to the influence of the folklorists who discovered and promoted her in the 1970s:

The contexts within which she told those stories—conversations with me and other sympathetic feminist scholars, who encouraged her to elaborate when she mentioned difficulties with her husband—exemplify the opportunities for further transformation that interaction with new types of audiences subsequently provided. (71)

In keeping with her view of Eldreth as a victim of a repressive patriarchal culture, Sawin sees Eldreth’s ghost story “Light in the Bedroom” as part of the continuing power negotiation between Eldreth and her husband:

Ed Eldreth is dead and should, at last, be out of his wife’s life. But as a ghost, he refuses to disappear and leave her alone. Even more frightening in this form because less predictable, he haunts her. Clinging to patriarchal power, he lingers vindictively, half-absent, half-present, refusing to allow Eldreth the closure his full absence would confer, refusing to let her get on with a new life from which he is absent. (129)

Sawin presents this as a transformative moment for Eldreth in which “she determines to pit her will against Ed in a way she rarely dared to when he was alive. This encounter with the revenant light represents her first exercise in practicing the freedoms of widowhood” (129).

However, by Sawin’s own account, Eldreth’s self-empowerment preceded both her contact with folklorists and her husband’s death. During her entire marriage she had enacted her worth successfully in a space where her husband had no control—by singing in church. Since Ed

Eldreth did not attend church (200), Eldreth was able to escape his domination regularly, and in a context where, as Sawin points out, she was also allowed to occupy the “male” space of the raised dais and pulpit (195). Sawin’s account of Eldreth’s refusal to let folklorists determine how she is presented in public performances (204-208) also indicates that this is not a woman who was entirely a victim, but one who exercises considerable power.

Another discourse that underlies Sawin’s re-presentation of Eldreth is one of class. Sawin frames her discussion of the importance Eldreth places on work within a political discourse “(promoted by early Appalachian studies activists) of the region as an agrarian paradise of yeomen” (25). Sawin argues that Eldreth’s life illustrates the existence of an unequal, stratified class structure in the mountains and she even seems to take Eldreth to task for not critiquing that system. Sawin believes that Eldreth’s pride in hard work conflicts with her shame at her persisting poverty. She assumes that Eldreth’s values were determined by those of higher class standing: “‘Respectability’ was defined by the 3 or 4 percent of the Appalachian elite who owned large tracts of land, were highly educated, and did not engage in any type of manual labor” (57).

However, in my experience, not all mountaineers acquiesced in or internalized the notion of respectability held by an elite few or by the American middle class in general, and consequently many felt no “shame” in their lack of material wealth. Similarly, of Eldreth’s typical pre-industrial lifestyle Sawin says: “Her considerable self-sufficiency, then, was a necessity born of poverty, not the result of adherence to something we might identify as ‘Appalachian culture’” (52). In my own experience, some mountaineers cherished self-sufficiency precisely because it allowed a degree of independence from wage labor and control by the affluent. Self-sufficiency is not necessarily poverty. A lack of material wealth is seen as poverty only within a class discourse that values the acquisition of material wealth.

Sawin also posits a strong gender differentiation in acceptable work for men and women in mountain culture and uses Eldreth’s story of “Cutting Timber with Clyde” as an example. In the story, Eldreth describes work that she and her sister did while they were young—cutting chestnut trees to sell for extract with a crosscut saw, splitting and stacking logs, and even pulling the loads of logs like draft animals. Sawin sees this as an instance of women doing men’s work and suggests that because there were so few boys in Eldreth’s family the “boundaries of who did what may have been more permeable” (58). She does not take account of the fact that Eldreth’s work experience was not unique to her

family but was common among mountain women. As young girls, my sister and I cut firewood with a crosscut saw and split it with an ax. The women in my family would see this as normal work for a mountain woman. Other scholars have questioned the notion that work roles in the backcountry were sharply divided by gender. For example, David Hackett Fischer, in *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), notes that mountain women routinely did what other English cultures considered to be men's work (676).

Finally, I'd like to consider Sawin's discussion of Eldreth's practical joking and blackface performances. Eldreth's practice of dressing herself and her relatives in blackface to play jokes on her neighbors was not typical mountain behavior and may have been idiosyncratic on Eldreth's part. Sawin identifies no source for Eldreth's practice nor does she refer to any other reports of blackface performances by mountain people. Sawin first interprets the performances within a discourse of class: "Eldreth differentiates herself from blacks in order to solidify her whiteness and rescue herself from the disparaged racial category 'poor white,' to which her class standing threatens to assign her" (152). But Sawin fails to address fully the relationship of blackface performance to affluent middle-class white culture. As an uneducated poor woman in economic competition for status and jobs, Eldreth is probably less complicit in reinforcing our sexist and racist American culture than were, for example, a group of affluent upper-middle-class white male Civil War veterans from Worcester, Massachusetts. Many of these men were fiercely abolitionist and had served in the Union forces that occupied eastern North Carolina, but after the war's end, they blacked their faces and performed "plantation" songs from the South for appreciative affluent upper-middle-class white audiences in the city's opulent opera hall. Advertisements and articles about them appear regularly in Worcester newspapers from the 1890s.

Moreover, Sawin does not limit her discussion to a consideration of one person's negotiation of power within economic and class constraints. She extrapolates from the behavior of one person to characterize all mountaineers: "The salience of blackface in Eldreth's joking also requires us to rethink the attractive image of the mountains as distinct from the rest of the antebellum South in having few slaves and consequently being inherently less racist" (152).

Sawin acknowledges that ninety to ninety-five percent of mountaineers did not participate in slave-owning culture and that only the most affluent owned slaves, but she rejects the view held by what she terms "champions of mountain culture" that mountain whites were less

prejudiced against blacks than lowland whites (153). Curiously, she cites Frederick Law Olmstead's 1854 report that mountain residents had "equal contempt for slaves, their masters, and the system itself" as proof of their racism rather than the regionalism it clearly was. She cites a lack of interest in abolition in the mountains of North Carolina at the same time as she refers to evidence of it: "There is even a mountain in Ashe County whose official name for many years was 'Nigger Mountain'" (153). Sawin is apparently unaware that, according to local legend, Mount Jefferson in central Ashe County was a station on the Underground Railroad and that a group of sixty runaway slaves waiting to head north was discovered in a cave there, giving the mountain its former name. Nor does she acknowledge that scores of illiterate mountain men (including my own great-grandfather), unrecorded in historical records as abolitionists, fought and sometimes died for the Union because they opposed slavery.

Mountaineers are currently beleaguered by severe economic and social pressures: jobs are disappearing, the best-paying jobs are being taken by newcomers, wealthy retirees are driving up land values and taxes. Many are being displaced. In some parts of the mountains, a mountain accent is never heard because mountaineers can no longer afford to live there. Mountaineers have become commodities within the new discourse of cultural tourism. In this social and political context, it is unfortunate that revisionist historians rush to discredit positive views of mountain people. It helps those who exploit the region to justify what they do. Given these threats to the continuation of the culture I share, I am heartened by the memory of a newspaper cartoon that was displayed on my mother's refrigerator for years. It showed two hillbillies in ragged overalls and floppy fedoras, rifles in hand, reading a newspaper headline, "Johnson Declares War on Poverty." One says to the other, "By God, he'll know he's been in a fight." Possibly, in the long run, mountain culture will survive the scholarship of Appalachia.

Listening for a Life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth through Her Songs and Stories by Patricia Sawin. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004. Pp. 254; photographs; works cited; index; paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 0-87421-582-X.

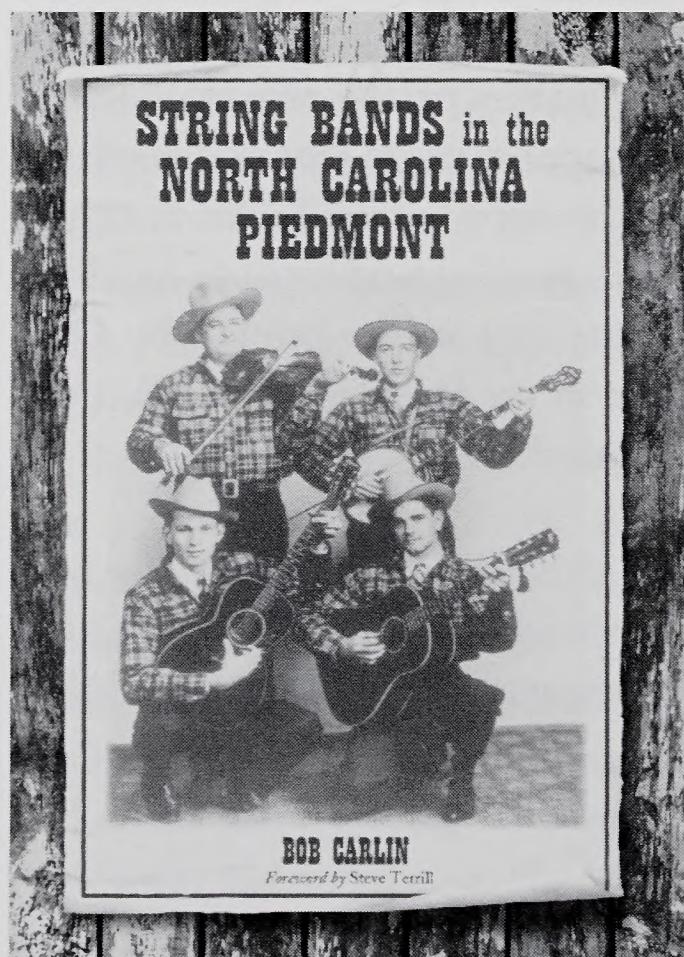
*String Bands in the
North Carolina Piedmont*
by Bob Carlin
~ reviewed by Amy Davis

*L*iterally a man of many hats, Bob Carlin is perhaps best known as a banjo player, musician, and recording artist who performed with The Delaware Water Gap in the 1970s, fiddler Bruce Molsky, and with John Hartford's string band until Hartford's death in 2001. Carlin has also labored tirelessly as a producer, recording engineer, compiler, and annotator for numerous recordings of traditional string band music. A recent discography cites nearly forty recordings in which Carlin has worked in one of these roles over the past twenty-five years, setting him squarely in the forefront of the vernacular string band music revival.¹

Now Bob Carlin has applied his knowledge of North Carolina music and his talent as a researcher to bring us *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont*. The book represents well over a decade of painstaking research into the lives, stories, and careers of dozens of musicians from a region that was often overlooked by historians and folklorists fixated on the music of the nearby Appalachians. He therefore set out from his home in Lexington, North Carolina, to document the vernacular string

band music of the Piedmont. His narrative flows almost entirely from the many interviews he and other researchers conducted with musicians or their next-of-kin, reminiscing about music in their family and community lives.

Carlin's strength is also in his research: he scoured local libraries for articles, advertisements, and notices culled from area newspapers. He has made exemplary use of archival interviews, particularly from collections housed at the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His crowning achievement, however, is the



Cover illustration courtesy of McFarland Publishing.

inclusion of scores of striking historical photographs, well placed throughout the book to illustrate the topic at hand. Photos portray young, eager men (and a few women) posing in dress clothes, suspenders, bolo ties, and hats, proudly displaying their instruments. The images capture other glorious moments as well: a young girl dancing on a wooden front porch while her grandfather fiddles; four horses pulling a bandwagon of musicians past an orchard on their way to play for a school graduation, which we learn was a common practice until school consolidations in the early-to-mid twentieth century; a five-piece country band playing at the Dixie Classic Fair in Winston-Salem under a gigantic sign for a straw ballot vote during the Eisenhower and Stephenson presidential campaign.

Carlin organizes his material thematically, describing the music making that was heard at community events; the introduction of fiddle and banjo to the region; and the influence of traveling entertainment, particularly minstrel shows that toured the region both before and after the Civil War. He also devotes an important chapter to black string band music in the region, including references to an African American fiddlers' convention, which was held in Statesville in 1909 to benefit a local "colored" fire company. Later chapters address music making within families: how people acquired their instruments and learned to play. Others focus on community events: square dances, school "exhibitions," and fiddlers conventions (contests). The stories that come through in these narratives are wonderful and captivating.

The final chapters, where Carlin really hits his stride, are more biographical in nature. Carlin presents excellent material on such musicians as Ernest Thompson and Dave McCarn, who were recorded during the 1920s and 1930s. His recognition and coverage of the role of radio stations in the region include not only the larger stations (WBT in Charlotte and WPTF in Raleigh), but also the smaller, regional players, WJSJ in Winston-Salem, WBIG in Greensboro, and WBWR in Asheboro. As radio provided greater opportunities for more musicians to become full-time entertainers, we learn about the top tier of the Piedmont's regional bands, including Charlie Monroe, Gurney Thomas, and Glenn Thompson.

String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont is an excellent resource for music scholars and anyone interested in our state's vernacular music. I particularly like the book's emphasis on local and regional artists, who have been ignored nationally, but were influential in their particular locales. Carlin skillfully works all levels of players into his text, including some of the region's seminal musicians. The final chapter on bluegrass musicians, for example, focuses on the career of L. W. Lambert, "who

chose to stay at home and play on a semi-professional basis. These bands [such as Lambert's] kept high-quality bluegrass in front of area audiences and provided a training ground for some of the best in the current generation of pickers and singers" (237). This speaks to the heart of Carlin's mission: to provide solid information about regional musicians, who either didn't choose to tour nationally, who never got the "big break," or who perhaps had a run of bad luck like Ernest Thompson who, despite his many recordings for Columbia during the 1920s, wound up barely making a living as a street musician in Winston-Salem for most of his later years.

At times, the recitation of facts about each musician makes for tedious reading, particularly with Carlin's insistence on listing birth and death dates after the first mention of a name. If these dates were incorporated in the index or in an appendix, the text would flow more smoothly.

Although we learn in Steve Terrill's "Foreword" that Carlin admires works that are "long on research and short on analysis" (1), I do wish a stronger case had been made at the outset for the role of the Piedmont's social and economic history in the development of string band music. This would help set the stage for the many stories we hear. While the narratives throughout the book beautifully illustrate the lives of farmers, textile mill workers, furniture makers, and others who were part of our Piedmont communities, a greater cognizance of this unique story of growth and social change would help us begin to understand why this music thrived as it did in this particular region.

This is not meant to slight an excellent book, chock full of information about an underappreciated musical expression of North Carolina's social and artistic history. Bob Carlin is to be commended for bringing so many forgotten names to light. While reading the chapter about L.W. Lambert, I was struck by a comment of *New York Times* music critic Robert Palmer, who heard Lambert's band at Carnegie Hall in 1980: "Mr. Lambert and his band worked together superbly as a unit, their instrumental solos were inspired and inventive." Palmer then declared that Lambert and his fellow musicians "played the finest bluegrass this listener has ever heard on a New York stage" (244). Then I realized that I had never heard Lambert's music. So, let's hope that one of Carlin's next projects will be a companion CD—with Lambert's music on it—for *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont*. Given Carlin's demonstrated talent in the production of vintage recordings, the idea is not so far-fetched.

String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont, by Bob Carlin. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004. Pp. 267; photographs and illustrations; appendices; bibliography; index; \$39.95. ISBN: 0-7864-1826-5.

Endnote

¹ Gillespie, Gail. "Bob Carlin: Capped Crusader for Old-Time Music." *The Old-Time Herald*, 7.5 (2000): 14-21.

Contributors

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John Foster West served as President of the North Carolina Folklore Society from 1972-73. After serving in the Air Corps in World War II, he received degrees in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was one of the founders of *Carolina Quarterly*. He taught English at Elon College and Old Dominion University before becoming writer-in-residence at Appalachian State University in 1968. He retired from teaching in 1990, but continues to write fiction and poetry. His latest book is *High Noon in Pompeii: The Latter-Day Poetry of John Foster West* (2004).



Portsmouth Island landscape. *Kodak infrared photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Folklore Society Awards

Each year the North Carolina Folklore Society recognizes the work of individuals and organizations who have made important contributions to the transmission, appreciation, and study of the cultural traditions of North Carolina.

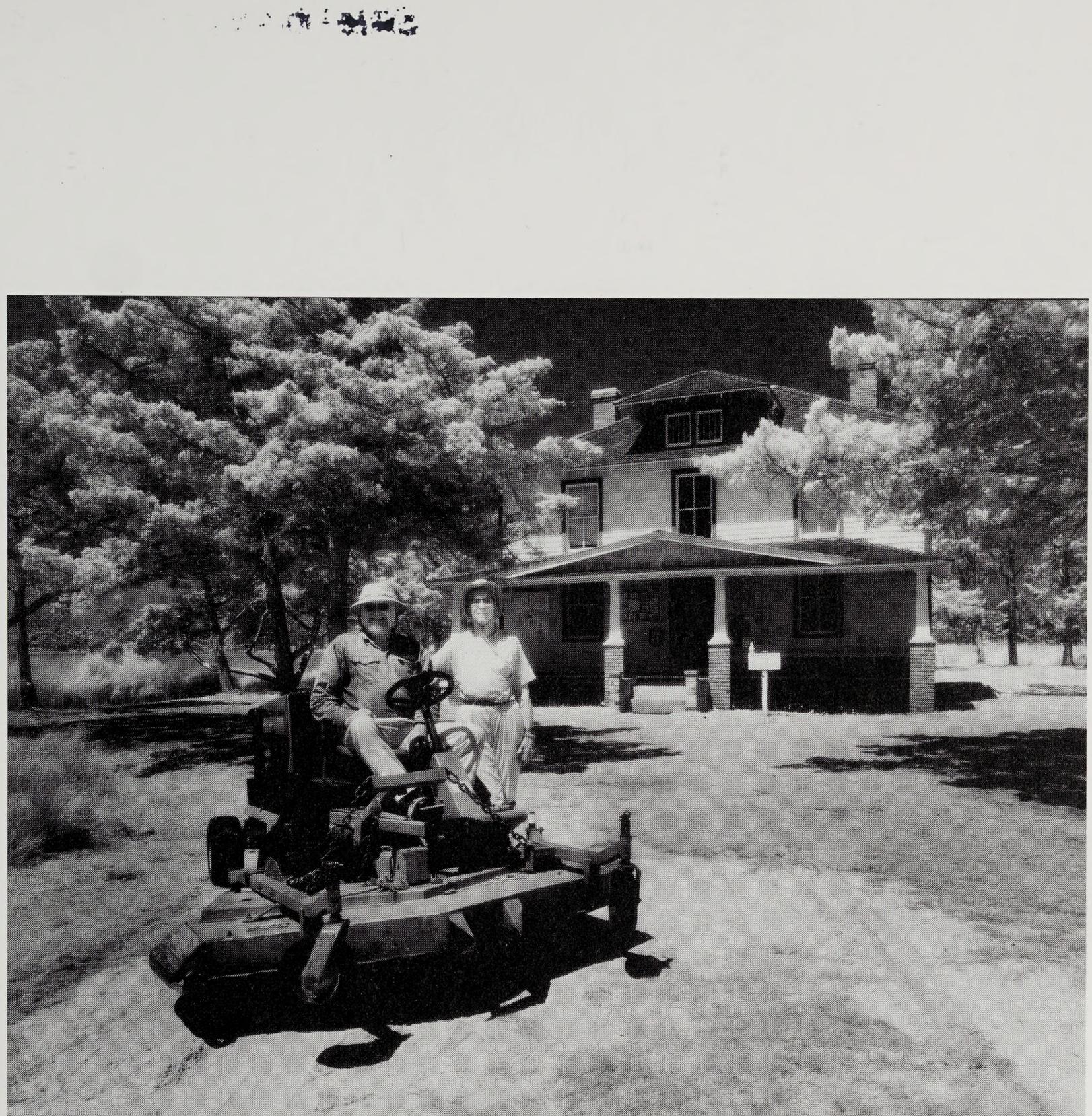
The Society's **Brown-Hudson Folklore Award**, named for legendary folklorists Frank C. Brown and Arthur Palmer Hudson, honors individuals like Paul Green (1971), Doc and Merle Watson (1975), Guy Owen (1977), Etta Baker and Cora Phillips (1982), Bland Simpson (1999), Freeman Owle (2001), and Mary Anne McDonald (2004).

Our **Community Traditions Award** honors organizations like El Pueblo Incorporado (2000), the Museum of the Cherokee Indian—Qualla Boundary (2001), the Charlotte Folk Society (2002), and The Foundation for Shackleford Horses, Inc (2004).

The Society also sponsors an annual student essay contest. The **Cratis D. Williams Award** recognizes the best study of North Carolina folklife by a graduate student, and the **W. Amos Abrams Award** recognizes the best study by an undergraduate. These awards are named for two of North Carolina's most distinguished folklorists and educators.

For more information, please visit the North Carolina Folklore Society's website:

<http://www.ecu.edu/ncfolk>



Above: Former educators Ed and Renee Burgess of Burlington, North Carolina. Now National Park Service volunteers, they live at Portsmouth for six weeks each summer. *Kodak infrared photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Front Cover: At the end of the Portsmouth Homecoming hymn sing, Rudy Carter rang the church bell to call everyone together for the worship service. Rudy is a descendant of Rose Ireland, the former slave who remained on Portsmouth after the Civil War. He is also the cousin of Henry Pigott (1896-1971), the last African American and the last male to live on Portsmouth Island. Over the years, it became Henry's responsibility to ring the bell. *Photo by Jan Eason, 2004.*

Back Cover: Church and barn on Portsmouth. *Kodak infrared photos by Jan Eason, 2004.*

